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HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS.

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R. Hamilton Gibson
1881
REVERIE

HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

OR

SAUNTERINGS IN NEW ENGLAND

BY

WILLIAM HAMILTON GIBSON

AUTHOR OF "PASTORAL DAYS"

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Illustrated

"Every vista a cathedral
Every bough a revelation"

NEW YORK
HARPER & BROTHERS, FRANKLIN SQUARE

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1824

TO

MY MOTHER

ALL THAT IS WORTHY IN THIS VOLUME

I Dedicate in Love and Gratitude

Saunterings.

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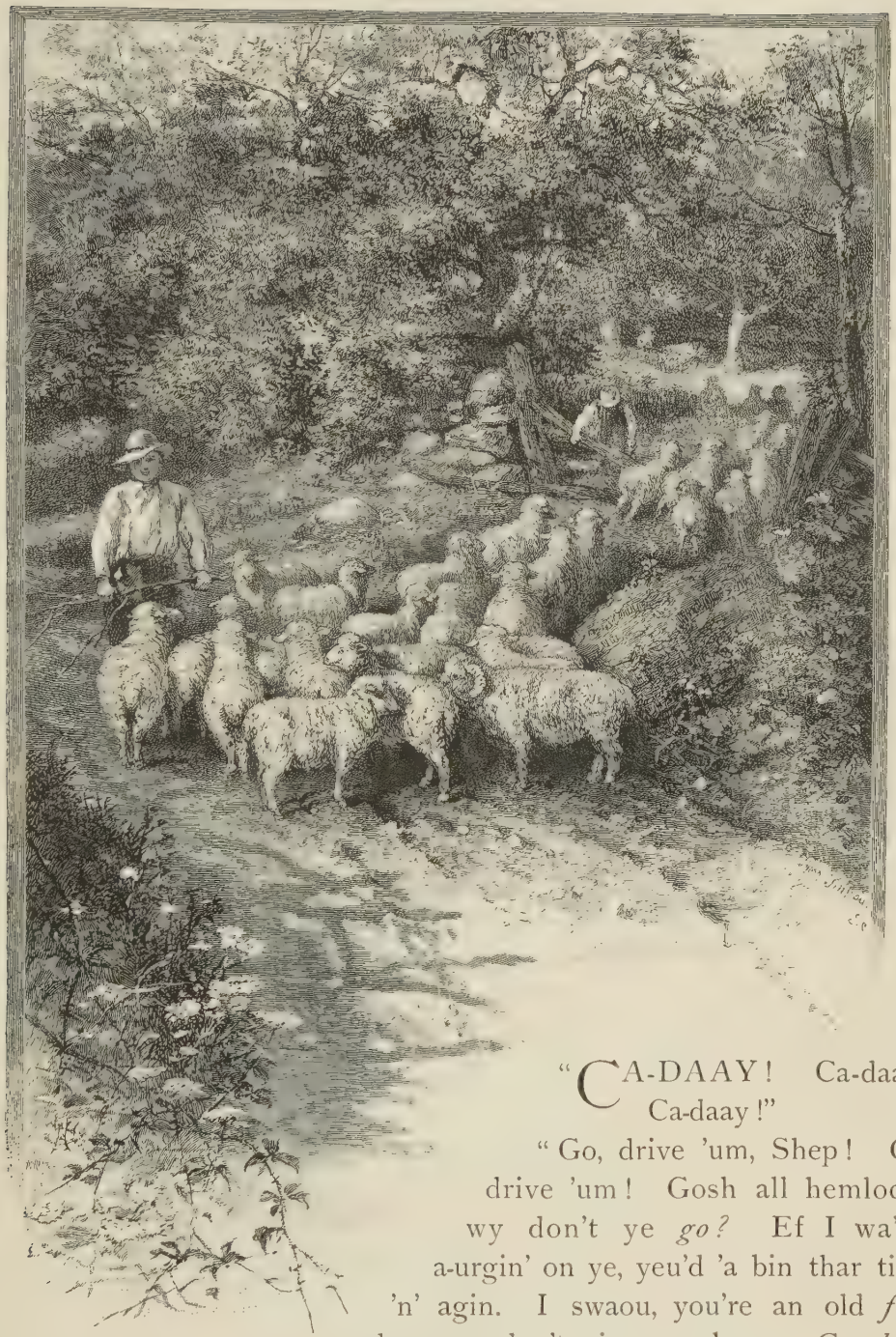
Along the Road.

"For I have learned
To look on Nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh, nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts—a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows, and the woods,
And mountains, and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye and ear, both what they half create
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
In Nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being."



"CA-DAAY! Ca-daay! Ca-daay!"

"Go, drive 'um, Shep! Go, drive 'um! Gosh all hemlock! wy don't ye *go?* Ef I wa'n't a-urgin' on ye, yeu'd 'a bin thar time 'n' agin. I swaou, you're an old *fool* dog; ye don't airn yer keep. *Go, drive 'um, I tell ye!*" And now we hear a half-suppressed grunt, and the eye of fancy might almost see the whizzing stone that followed. It

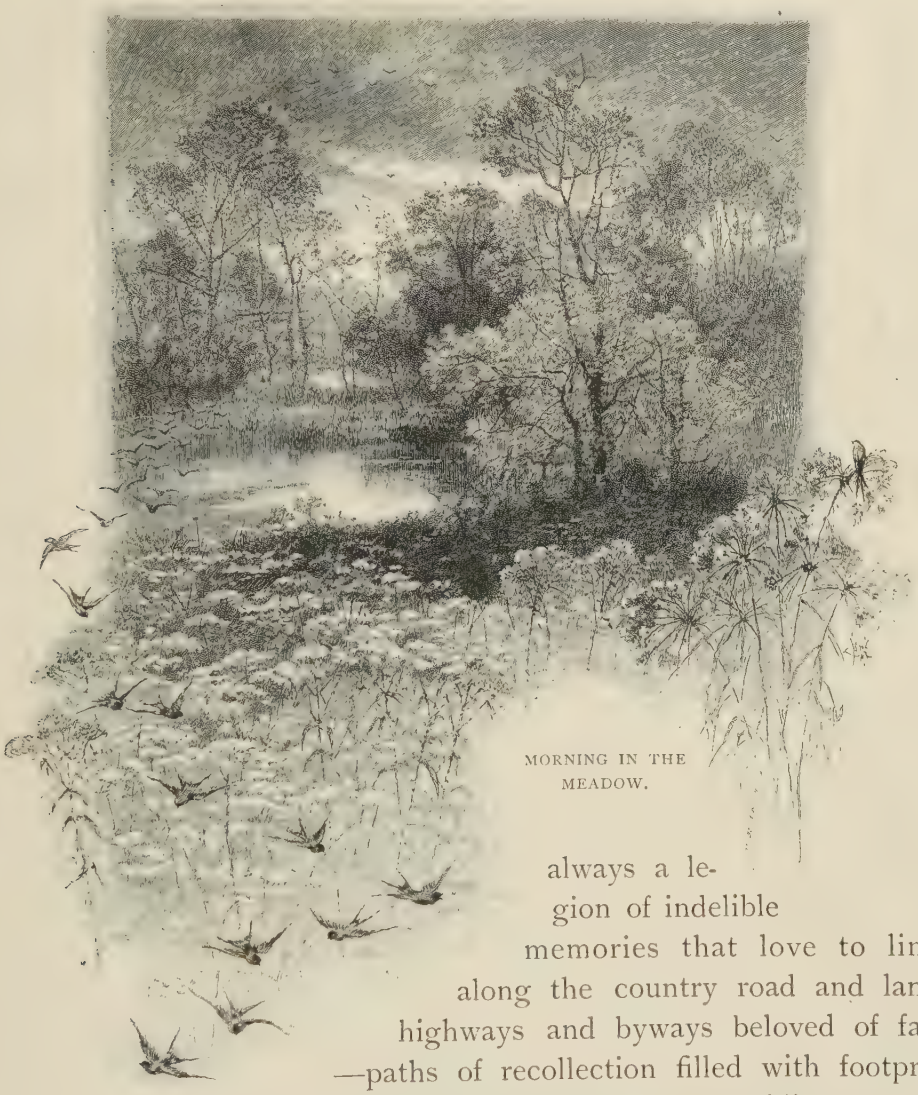
was a voice full of that panting vehemence born of an excited temper, with a lack of the wherewithal to give it full utterance; for there were some questionable utterances under that short breath, and its puffing modulations and labored accompaniment of heavy footfalls pictured a hot and excited chase. But it was a picture through the sense of sound alone, for its source and all its surroundings were concealed in a dense cloud of dust, which, like a veil of yellow smoke, had risen over the road before us, and shut out all our prospect.

"Go, drive 'um, Shep!" yelled the remnant of the panting voice. "Go, drive 'um. Thar! *thet's* suthin' *like.* Naow, give it to 'um *lively;*" and a fresh cloud rises up among the trees amid a trampling sound of a host of hurrying hoofs and a half-human chorus of the bleating sheep; and now Shep's voice is heard among the scramble, and now we hear the ring of boyish voices, intermingled with the tuneful clatter of the falling pasture bars. Erelong, as we follow on, the dense cloud softens, sinks, and melts away among the trees, and lingers above the meadow grass; while the landscape steals softly into view, first the apple-tree against the sky, and now its overhanging branch and shadow on the wall; and in a moment more we see the woolly huddle in the road, from whence, hemmed in on either side, they sally up the bank, and frisk away to pastures new in the sloping orchard lot beyond.

How many beautiful pictures have I seen emerge from a cloud of dust upon a country road! How many of those pictures have again been half obliterated by the dust of after-years, only to be recalled to life by even so trivial a thing as the bleating of a lamb, the ring of a boyish laugh, or the homely music of the falling pasture bars!

Pity for him whose heart knows no such sensitive and latent chord of sympathy to yield its harmony along the way, lending an inspiration to the present, while sanctifying the past, and drawing from its better memories a renewed delight in living! There is no walk in life, however dull or prosaic, no circumstances so commonplace, that they can stifle this ever-present melody. It sings in unison with nature in a thousand different keys—in a falling leaf or a cricket song. The raindrops of to-day but repeat the old-time patter on the garret-roof. The noisy katydid, whenever heard, is that same untiring nightly visitant outside your window to whose perpetual whim you loved to listen, and in fancy tantalize until you dropped off to sleep upon your pillow. This skimming swallow sailing near will never cross your path but so

surely will he fly to those same old nests beneath the barn-yard eaves. If there is ever a blessed mood "most musical, most melancholy," it may be found beneath the refining influence of just such reminiscences; for whether or not there are added elements of home association, there are



MORNING IN THE MEADOW.

always a legion of indelible memories that love to linger along the country road and lane—highways and byways beloved of fancy—paths of recollection filled with footprints which not even the tempest can obliterate.

Go where you will among New England hills—it matters not—seek out some isolated town hidden far away from any past associations, and how quickly do you find yourself upon the same old tangled road! The same familiar friends have come and crowded on either side to meet you as of old; the same birds sing in the self-same trees; and the

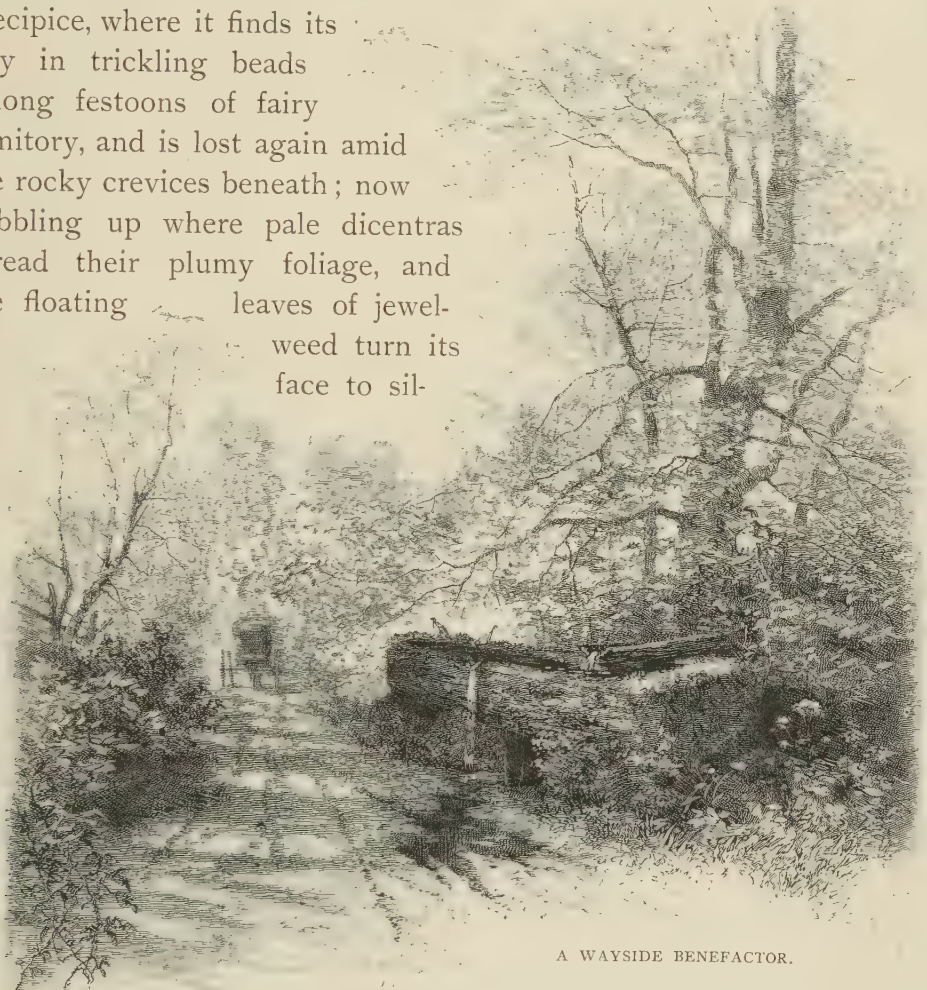
quivering aspens whisper and clap their hands in welcome, as in years gone by. Here, too, is the identical low-roofed house among the maples, with its vine-clad porch and open door—the always open door, betokening the kind and open-hearted hospitality within, and which in New England is abroad in all the air, seeking you out even in the loneliest byway.

There is one of these roads I have in mind. I only made its acquaintance a few short months ago, but it already seems as though it had been my tramping-ground for years. I know its every nook, its every fence-corner; and many are its tender flowers that I have picked and torn to pieces in my love and desire to know them better, and many are the mockeries, called "sketches," which still exist to libel and profane its beauty. It is a single drive among the hills and dells of a charming nook, scarcely a league in length; but where, by some happy chance or rare design, Nature has contrived to bring together a typical expression—a representative congress, as it were—of New England's most charming individuality and character. There are whole sections now and then which seem to have been transplanted bodily from the wild woods of Maine or the rugged borders of the Housatonic. The brooks reflect the umbrageous banks of my own Shepaug. The same old rumbling saw-mills have floated down the streams, and lodged upon the banks among their overhanging willows; and if a rustic native chances on your way, he is the same old neighbor you so well remember, or at least you feel a certainty that he must be his brother or some near relation.

I have a note-book full from cover to cover with transcripts from this roadside, but its record is bewildering; neither is it necessary; for, as I look upon its familiar shape beside me, there are certain pages which shine through those closed covers, and I find myself once more upon that road without its farther aid, sitting, perhaps, beneath the swaying beech-boughs, listening to some ill-tempered, scolding squirrel among the sunny leaves, or to the music of the tiny crystal stream across the way, as it shoots along through its mossy groove, and pours, in a little glistening column, into the old log water-trough. Who is he that is not athirst as he nears the old log water-trough? Who can pass it by without a greeting, or even a grateful touch of the lips?

I often wonder whether is it alone the fancy that imparts to the way-side spring that wild and subtle flavor? Does it not tell therein the

story of its mysterious wanderings through the leaf-mould and the rooty loam; of trickling grottoes, cool and dark, among the mossy bowlders; of loiterings among the beds of fern and coltsfoot, with here a silent pool among the matted leaves, overhung with pale anemones and fringe of maidenhair, and there a sudden precipice, where it finds its way in trickling beads among festoons of fairy fumitory, and is lost again amid the rocky crevices beneath; now bubbling up where pale dicentras spread their plumy foliage, and the floating leaves of jewel-weed turn its face to sil-



A WAYSIDE BENEFACTOR.

ver; here drinking in the healing virtues of the pine from some soggy fallen cone, or taking tribute from the aromatic roots of ginseng and wild-ginger, while it nourishes in return their juicy leaves, that rise and crowd above its surface? There are faint suggestions, too, of hemlock and arbutus, of winter-green and bloodroot, and a host of those other wood companions, which you may be sure it has sought out and kissed along its way.

And now, as it emerges, pure as crystal, into the broad, open light,

see how its rustic trough would mimic its woodland solitudes with garlands of trailing vine and fern. See the velvet clumps of deep-green moss that crowd about its edge and dip beneath its surface, while all below, among its supporting rocks, every chink and cranny has become a nestling-place for some contented, moisture-loving spray.

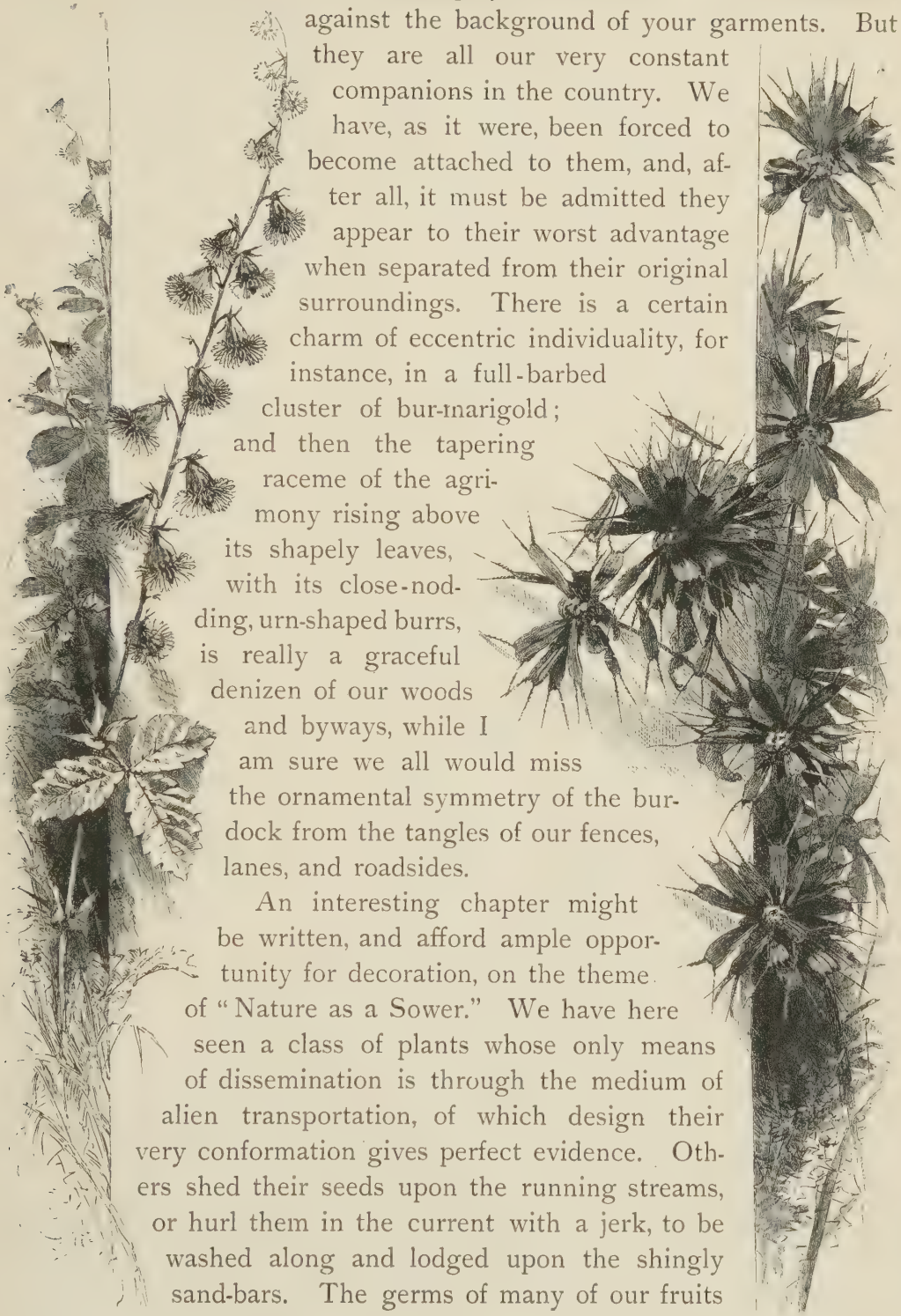
I sat and watched this picture for a long and pleasant hour. I saw the shadows of its overhanging beech play among its bright and fresh mosaic — saw the wood-thrush sit upon its brink and wet his throat, tired and hoarse, it would almost seem, from his incessant singing. The robin and the bluebird came; and the complaining cat-bird, interrupted in its bath, shook down a shower of imprecation at that weary traveller, hot and dusty, who stopped and bowed his head before the way-side benefactor, and passed, refreshed, along his way.

And with him we will follow. No, not yet, for there is a touch of humor in that venerable water-trough. It has its little harmless but doubly pointed joke for every intimate acquaintance, and no doubt enjoys it; for already the running water seems voiced in a rippling laugh, as we seat ourselves upon the bank for an earnest interview with these forked burrs which have impaled themselves in ranks and squads and entire companies upon every available portion of our clothing.

The study of botany is not a general pursuit. There are many who could not tell an akene from a silicle to save their lives; but only ask them if they ever saw a *beggar's-tick*, and they will glow with that true enthusiasm born of success in scientific research; for there is at least one page of botany with which every one is familiar—the family of the burrs, the cockles, and the tick-seed. You are always running against them in your rambles. They are the vagrants and the vagabonds of the vegetable world, the veritable tramps of the highways; and, like their affinity in human guise, they are, almost without exception, worthless immigrants from other shores. Nor has their emigration fever ever left them. It seems destined to become chronic and hereditary. They cling but lightly to their birthplace, are always ready to leave it on the slightest opportunity, and are ever on the watch to steal a passage to new and untried fields upon the first humble craft that shall chance their way.

Some of them, like the armed bur-marigolds, are bold and daring, and jab you with their spears in true highwayman fashion; others, as in the agrimony and enchanter's nightshade, sly and cautious, hiding

in unsuspected places, and eluding your detection until discovered against the background of your garments. But they are all our very constant companions in the country. We have, as it were, been forced to become attached to them, and, after all, it must be admitted they appear to their worst advantage when separated from their original surroundings. There is a certain charm of eccentric individuality, for instance, in a full-barbed cluster of bur-marigold; and then the tapering raceme of the agrimony rising above its shapely leaves, with its close-nodding, urn-shaped burrs, is really a graceful denizen of our woods and byways, while I am sure we all would miss the ornamental symmetry of the burdock from the tangles of our fences, lanes, and roadsides.



An interesting chapter might be written, and afford ample opportunity for decoration, on the theme of "Nature as a Sower." We have here seen a class of plants whose only means of dissemination is through the medium of alien transportation, of which design their very conformation gives perfect evidence. Others shed their seeds upon the running streams, or hurl them in the current with a jerk, to be washed along and lodged upon the shingly sand-bars. The germs of many of our fruits

and berries look to the birds for their future opportunities of growth, while nuts find an abundant means of distribution in the *joint* propensities of boys and squirrels. Others, like the samaras of the tulip-tree and pine, are launched from the tree-tops, and flutter with a will to the farthest limit of their strength; while many, more ethereal and spirit-like, as in the thistle and the fireweed, are provided with wings as light as air: they are at home upon the breeze, and the whole earth is their kingdom.

To the latter class belongs that embodiment of grace, our roadside clematis—the queen of all our native climbers—trailing over walls and fences, throwing its embroidered canopy over the unsightly stubble, covering the ungainly branch with waving sprays of borrowed verdure, and swinging its drooping arabesques in most charming abandon along the borders of every pond or running brook.

This beautiful vine brings renewed delight to me with each successive year; and next autumn, when I follow once more these pleasant rambles, when I can look again upon these downy clusters, silvered in the sunlight, or shadowed in cloudy puffs against the luminous, translucent leaves, while I enjoy the endless charm of its graceful spray, I hope it will forgive me for so idle, albeit so loving, an attempt to reproduce its beauty on the printed page.

The occasional spreading copse of clematis is as certain an accompaniment of the New England road as are its footprints or its wheel-ruts; but here upon this matchless road we come upon a long, low stretch where for rods and rods on every side it spreads above the shrubbery in a perfect maze of intermingled leaves and fuzzy puffs, with here and there a leaf of fiery sumac bursting like flame among the smoky seeds. It crowds upon your carriage-wheels; adventurous tips reach out upon the highway, and erelong your very whipstock would be sure to feel the embrace of its circling leaf-stem. And still I would venture to say that, search where you will in all that wide-spread tangle, it were a task to find a single sprig in which this charming vine has been untrue to its pure ideal of perfect elegance and grace.

Not a hundred feet beyond this display, and we meet another of those little surprises ever in store for us along these roads, and often affording a contrast which almost bears the impress of design; for here certainly the line of beauty is directly confronted with the stiff, unbending perpendicular. Two sloping banks rise up abruptly on either side,

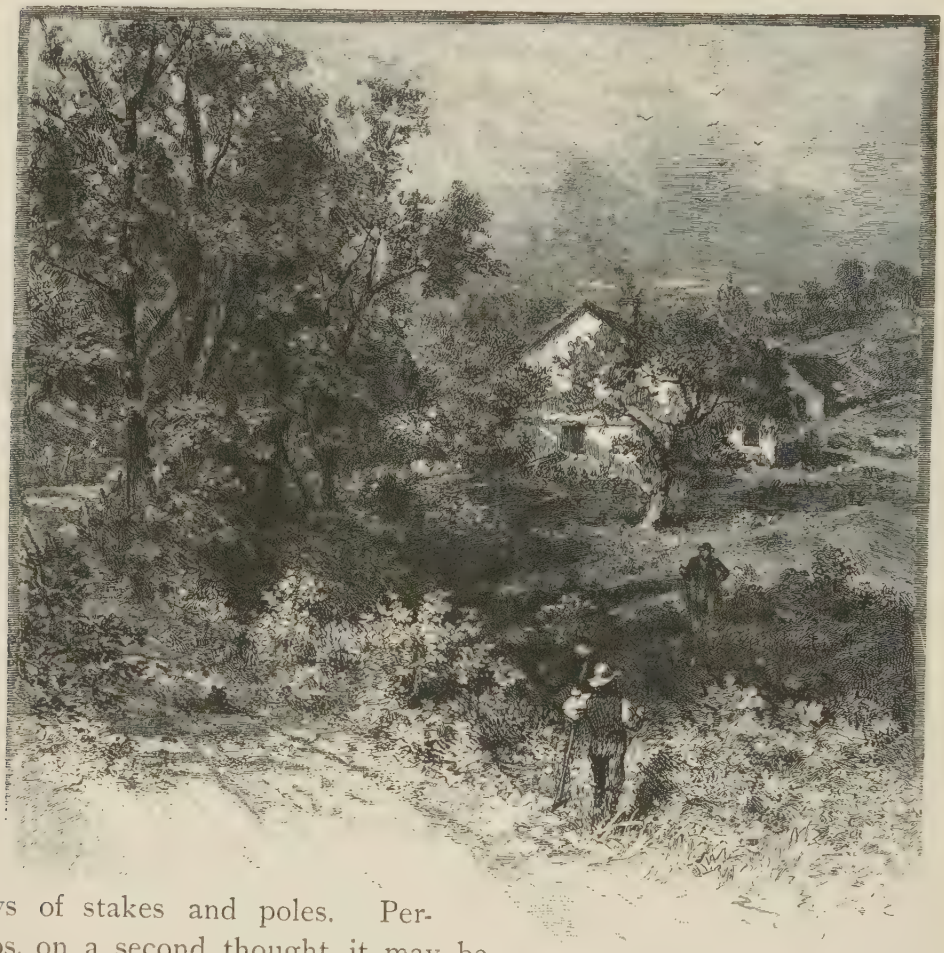
guarded by ranks and tiers of towering mulleins — a veritable army of sentinels, erect, armed, and ammunitioned for the fray. If you doubt it, search them closer. Here are pockets full of fine black powder, and pistils by the thousand, primed and loaded to the muzzle. And does your fancy detect the odor of the smoke of battle? No; it is but the incense of the pennyroyal that they are trampling under their moccasoned feet, and which carpets the ground about them.

But we are soon out of their reach, for a quick, sharp turn takes us up a steep ascent, and we wonder what will be the outlook when our tugging pony reaches the open summit. Here the road has run up to look around a bit, and get its bearings in the landscape, taking one short glimpse of a billowy field of golden wheat, an orchard, a winding brook, and — but what else we cannot see, for now we make a sudden dip, only to dive into a dark, umbrageous tunnel of interwoven maples, and we draw the rein to let our eyes wander among the cool shadows of the sugar-grove, among the lichen-painted rocks and surrounding beds of pale-green fern, and perhaps to picture to ourselves the busy, snowy scene of early March, with its trickling spigots, and fumes of boiling sap emanating from that old sugar-house now almost lost to sight among the leaves.

Alas! how much virgin sweetness has been condensed into solidity beneath the roof of that innocent shanty!—solidity destined only to be used thereafter as a delicate flavoring for genuine brown sugar to gull the palate of the city-bred, and awaken pleasant pastoral visions, and wistful longings for "Vermont's" rural sweetness and simplicity. No wonder the sugar-maples of New England color more deeply than in other sections! The enforced indignity of competing in the market with plain plebeian molasses sugar should alone put them to the deeper blush.

No sooner do the shadows of these maples leave us than we are winding around the edge of a steep and rocky hill-side, where weed-grown "pasture-lands" creep far up toward the summit, with great gray masses of granite bowlders cropping out among the wild confusion, where coarse brown brakes, sweet fern, and spreading juniper run riot over the ground, and every open slope is terraced from side to side with sheepwalks. Below, we look down across a field of tasselled maize, with its rustling leaves and nodding plumes, and we know from the line of thrifty willows at its lower edge that a rivulet has there found its way

We can trace its channel far up the opposite bank, where its winding course is marked among the herbage, and its glistening cascades flash in the sunlight among the sloping daisy fields. Yonder, high up, near the summit of the ridge, we espy a little farm pinned to its slope by



A WAY-SIDE HOME.

rows of stakes and poles. Perhaps, on a second thought, it may be a hop plantation or a little vineyard, but how surely must it need that firm stone wall along its lower edge to brace against! Now comes a distant "gee" and "haw" and snap of whip, and you look with wonder at the lumbering ox-team that can even stand, much less make its way, upon so steep a footing. But that persevering pioneer will yet redeem this rugged waste, and make it blossom as the rose. The bed of stones and bowlders will soon grow into a net-work of sturdy walls, which will remain for ages monuments of his unflagging industry. Perhaps, too,

from his lofty perch he can look down for happy inspiration upon a little snuggery hidden somewhere among the trees below. Not that typical old Puritanic homestead of other days, but a snow-white cottage, bright and new, with modern reforms and comforts, the dwelling of the new generation—a little principality all by itself in the landscape, with its small village of trim out-buildings, its barns, and stable, corn-crib, ice-house, and hen-house, its close-clipped door-yard, its open porch, aglow with thrifty house-plants, with peeps of the tidy cosiness within, and, best of all, that brisk little body who is the life and light of all, and who blows the noonday horn that sends its echo to listening, eager ears far up among the hill-side stubble.

But in a moment this picture, too, has glided by, to be replaced by another in this lovely panorama — a silent passage through a dim and lofty forest of sombrous pines and hemlocks. The rural and the pastoral are forgotten; the daisied fields and waving corn are banished far from the thought. You are winding through a wilderness of nature's unredeemed primeval solitude. No sky above, nothing but a sombre roof that seems to echo your very whispers. There are sounds like weary sighs that seem to float and linger in the air, while on every hand the stately columns close in upon each other like a limitless cathedral, and the cool incense of the mossy mould breathes its benediction all through the vast interior. Here dwells

> "A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts."

The impress of that spirit which has found its noblest mortal voice in that song of immortality, "A Forest Hymn," whose music, like a mighty anthem, seems ever floating on "invisible breath" through the "stilly twilight" of this solemn temple:

> "Ah! why
> Should we, in the world's riper years, neglect
> God's ancient sanctuaries, and adore
> Only among the crowd, and under roofs
> That our frail hands have raised?"

How grim and sombre are the testimonies of this gloomy wilderness! Here are old bearded patriarchs who have looked out above and seen a world reclaimed and transfigured by the hand of man, while their feet are rooted in an ancient cemetery of their fallen ancestry, a chaos of

graves crowding above in moss-grown mounds, or down deep on deep beneath, crumbled, mingled, and lost in the shapeless mould.

This ancient retreat is known as No Man's Wood, a disputed inheritance from by-gone centuries, without deed or title. For fifty years it has been a bone of contention between two factions in the town. It is claimed by the descendants of an old Puritan pioneer, who, it is stated, made the purchase individually from the Sharrapaug Indians for the tempting consideration of a flint-lock musket, a keg of rum, and a gold toothpick. Never in history has the commercial genius of the Yankee had a more illustrious exemplar. But his claim could never be fully established to the entire satisfaction of the opposition, consisting of two hundred or more unreasonable descendants of several other contemporaneous townsmen; and so No Man's Wood owes its existence to a village feud. And blessed be that feud! may it linger long in the land to perpetuate this grand old image of by-gone ages! May imprecations fall upon his head who shall raise his axe in desecration of this sacred temple of the gods! The area of this forest covers in all about ten acres, in an oblong square reaching "from ye top of ye mounting known as ye Sharrapaug Mounting, downways to ye brooke w'h ye same is known as ye Saw Mill brooke, and bounded on ye north syde by Ezekiel Freeman his new meddy fence and on ye south syde by a lyne from ye branded tree near ye white rock on ye top of s'd mounting, along downways by ye divition of Indione landes w'h ye same is in ye hands of ye committy for to trade on with s'd Indiones, and downways again by ye boundary, w'h ye same can be found in ye deed of Ziby Prindle his pitch.

"Test. SIMEON TORREY, *Clerk.*"

So, in its quaint fashion, states the old town record, in which from year to year there is frequent mention of "ye s'd pitch," which latter word I gathered to mean that particular bit of land which any townsman should "pitch in" to secure or select whereon to "pitch his tent." There are also queer accounts of "meatings of ye proprietors of ye towne of Trumbull legally meet att ye house of jotham nichols in ye s'd town;" and one feels a sense of reproach toward a scribe who should thus refuse his fellow-townsman even the ordinary courtesy and dignity of the proper noun; but how quickly is that unjust aspersion dispelled by that revelation of charming modesty below! where we discover the same name thus inscribed, "Test. jotham nichols, clerk." The "meat-

ings" in question were those connected with the project of this very road, which, owing to the prospects of its heavy tax levy — involving as it did the further purchase of a considerable tract of Indian land—had stirred the county for miles around in a long and exciting controversy.

We learn that it was "voated down" by popular clamor at the time. But a farther search among those tattered pages reveals the existence of a rarely level-headed Puritan ancestry, and as generous a type of hospitality as ever turned the tables in the political campaigns of their illustrious posterity. Here, under date of December 30, 1712, we read as follows: "The inhabitants Aforesd made choyce of Ezekiel Freeman and Jeremiah Turney a committy for To measure y^e^ lande and settle y^e^ boundes With y^e^ Indiones, and also to procure four Gallons of rume to treate y^e^ indiones and to refresh ymselves, & charge y^e^ Townes debter for y^e^ rume & all other charge & troble necessary in compleeting y^e^ same."

Under such all-potent influences it need hardly be said that the "committy" carried the day. The road was shortly after an accomplished fact; and it were safe to affirm that, save upon the pathway of this road, no mortal man has ever crossed the boundaries of this wood. Not but that he *might* do it; but few there are, unless impelled by the fever of exploration or scientific research, who would care to penetrate its almost impassable jungle of craggy branches, or its waist-deep barriers of damp and mouldering débris hidden from sight beneath great beds and pillows and domes of light-green fern-moss.

There is a quarter of a mile of winding drive through this grand old aisle; and when soon again we feel the warm air floating in from the outer world, it is to look ahead, as through a great Gothic portal, where opens up a charming contrast of sunny road, winding along among idyllic pastoral scenes, of sunny cottages peeping out among the trees, of thrifty farms and fields of grain, and pleasant sounds of rural life and husbandry, and, surmounting all, a distance of magnificent sublimity, where lofty mountain-slopes softly mottled with gliding shadows loom up on every side, with here a pine-clad crest sharply cut against a hovering, sunlit cloud, and there a rugged peak, lost in the blue and hazy gloom of some majestic, luminous pile that seems to have stopped in its airy journey to rest and linger lovingly upon the towering summit, cooling and sheltering the sun-scorched brow in the depths of its refreshing shadow. And how exquisite the gliding grace of that

pearly shadow as it floats and paints its ceaseless changes across the landscape! Now sliding down the wooded mountain, taking by surprise

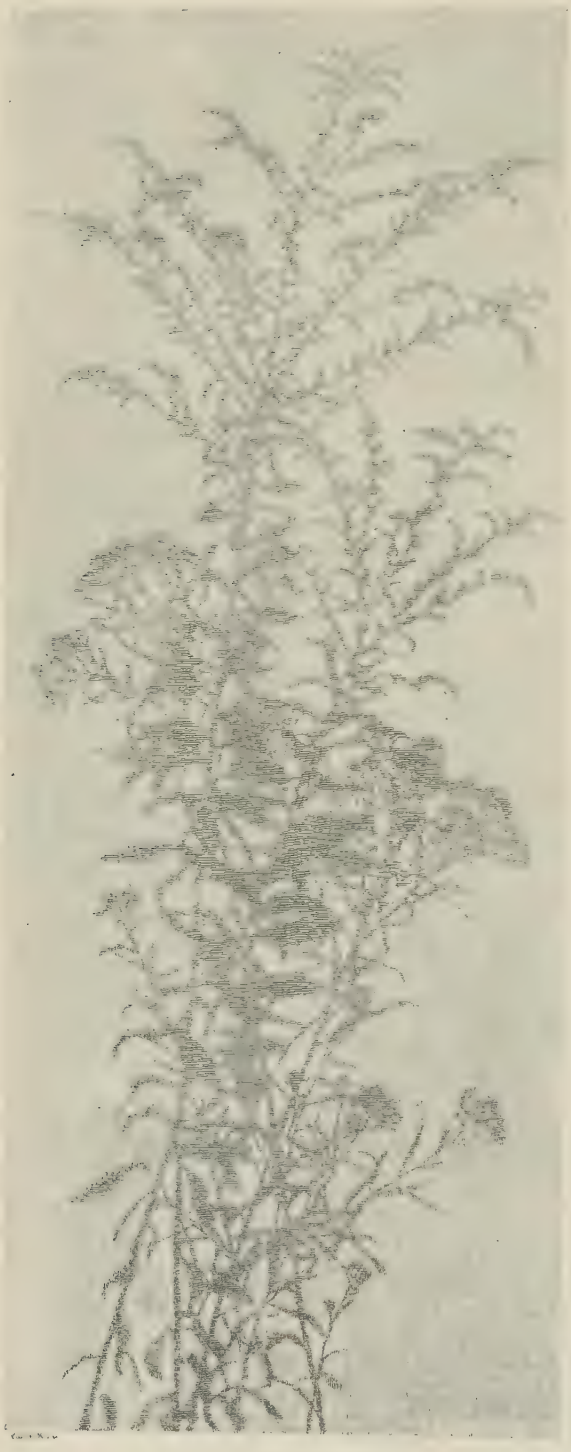
GOSSIP AND TWITTER.

some isolated clump of hemlocks that start out dark and gloomy from their obscurity; now stealing unawares upon some laughing water-fall,

whose roguish winking is changed to a sober frown. And now it creeps upon the edge of yonder field of daisies: see them toss and frolic in this respite from the scorching heat; and how quickly are they left again to burst forth in their silvery waving billows! The toiling farmer among the windrows in the hay-scented field greets the refreshing shadow as it passes, and stops to lift his hat and drink in its welcome coolness, and the linnet panting with open bill upon the fence near by finds heart for a few sweet notes of thanks.

Yonder distant mountain, which but a moment ago was luminous in sunlight, is now a deep-blue mystery; and against its lurid expanse, as if it were a lowering sky, the village cupolas and gables seem to dance like sunny white caps in their sea of waving elms and maples, with here and there a jutting spire and flashing weather-vane gleaming like an illumined light-house, and glittering flocks of pigeons, too, that seem less like doves than sporting gulls. Were you to ask this youngster who now approaches you on the road, seated on a pile of meal-bags whose weight bears down the sag of his long span buckboard nearly to the turf — it will surely run aground upon the next full thank-you-marm—but were you to ask him the name of this charming town, whose homes are now so thickly sprinkled among the roadside farms, he would doubtless tell you that *this* is "East Trumble," and that farther along, over the bridge, you would come to "Trumble Centre." We have not long since passed "Trumbull Four-Corners" (probably referring to the rectangles of the single house or barn in the township), and you may be perfectly sure that before your ride is finished you will have enjoyed the separate attractions of Trumbull proper, Trumbull Station, Trumbull Junction, West Trumbull, and perhaps lots of other little Trumbulls—Trumbull Mills, possibly, or Trumbull's Falls. And if you only inquire along the way during the next hour, you will have the name of that beautiful little town beyond as firmly impressed on your memory as are the ever-changing pictures of its lanes and roadsides.

But now all sight of its gables and steeples has left us, having dodged behind a jutting grove of maples, birches, and beeches, beneath whose canopy we are soon winding, where the road is carpeted far ahead in sidelong bands of sunlight, and gently moving shadows play among the branches and the mottled tree-trunks. Here we are suddenly walled in by tall precipices of rock hanging full with trickling ferns that nod and jump with the falling drops from the bursting



THE SWAYING SHADOW.

springs among its crevices, where trailing garlands of adlumia drape the rugged surface in graceful arabesques, looping its airy fringe from crag to crag, and throwing a bower of its tender green above the laurels and the overhanging shrubbery.

And when we once more emerge into the open light it is to creep along where hazel thickets crowd close upon our wheels, and great tall wreaths of high-vine bramble bend beneath their weight of purple fruit. If you notice your pony now you will see him prick up his ears for some little surprise he has learned to expect from among this roadside jungle.

Perhaps it is a little blue-eyed maiden who suddenly appears from her obscurity. She holds in her uplifted hands a small tray of tiny birch-bark baskets piled full of choice selected fruit. "Would you like some blackberries, sir?" she will say, with a sweetly modulated voice and a charming pink blush, whose combined effect cannot but arouse every spark of your latent gallantry; and of course you leave her with an empty tray, smiling and happy as she

counts her little handful of your pennies. Or perhaps it is those two everlasting boys, announced by the racket of their tin pails, who approach with anxious faces to tell you that your horse has "got a bone in his leg" or a "nail in his foot." And you are quite willing that such a serious misfortune should afflict him, if only to afford the glimpse of the convulsive pleasure it awakens in those ruddy, berry-stained faces beneath their broad straw hats. I can see those luminous little faces now, with their healthful color all aglow and beaming, from the golden radiance which shone down upon them from those sunlit hat-brims; and distinctly do I hear those clinking pails, the merry giggle, and the thud, thud of the little, tough bare feet trotting out of sight along the dusty road.

The element of surprise becomes an incessant forecast along one of these roads. If it is even a rustic conversation within ear-shot of the highway, it is sure to furnish its item of the unexpected, either to arrest your attention or arouse your curiosity.

"Say, Chauncey," I remember hearing in a yell across a potato-patch, "wen iz thet ar *funerul* a-cummin' off?" Or, on another occasion, a choice selection reserved for my especial benefit in an evening talk over the front picket-fence, presumably about a new yoke of steers:

"Wa'al, *no*, he ain't ezacly contrery; but t'uther's willin' to haul it, 'n' he's pleggy willin' he *shud;* 'n' how he *doos* haul! Gret guns! I wished yeu cud jest run up 'n' see him. I vaow, his eyes stick aout so's yeu cud hang yer *hat* on to 'um."

I had listened one day for a good half-hour to a long harangue that in some way came as a natural consequence to my simple question, "Neighbor, can you tell me what place this is?"

"Trumbull Four Corners," he replied; and then followed — how I don't exactly remember, but it came as a matter of course—that long, one-sided conversation, full of remarkable achievements in the way of trappin', fishin', and fox-huntin', till at length I glanced at my watch, and, gathering up the reins, concluded to cut it short.

"Well, neighbor," said I, good-naturedly, at my first chance to get in a word, "there's one thing that you *certainly* know how to do, and that is *entertain.*" But he was sharp enough to detect a possible hidden intention in the word.

"Wa'al," he immediately replied, while a broad smile started at his mouth and gradually spread all over among the wrinkles of his good-natured face, "I cal'late you're ez gud ez thet ar *hen* yender, ain't ye?"

"Am I to take that as a gentle hint for me to 'scratch gravel?'" I inquired, getting ready to start.

"Not 'tall, not 'tall," replied he, deprecatingly. "But naow jest look on't: thet ar hen hez gut a lot o' *sweepin's* thar, but she knows enuff t' pick aout the *kernels 'n' leave the chaff*."

"Perhaps there are no kernels," suggested I, thoughtfully.

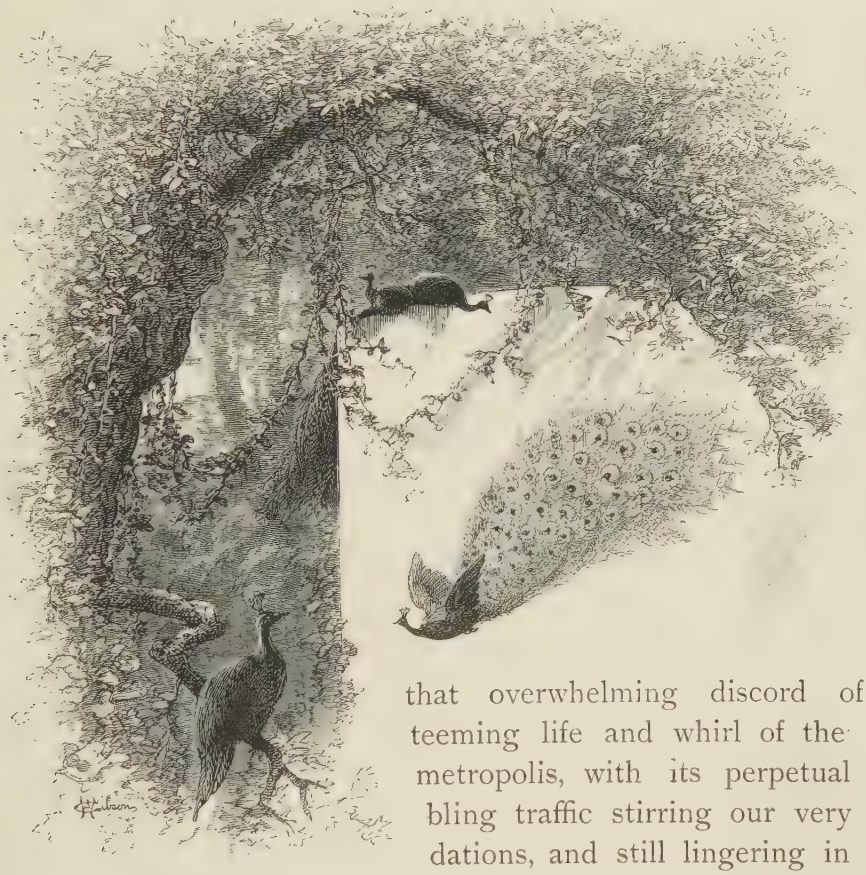
"Ah, the *kernels* is *thar*, I'm thinkin'," he continued, with a knowing look. "They're *thar*, er else she wudn't a be *a-wastin' on her vallable time*, yeu kin depend on't."

Talk of the characteristic *blurting* propensities of the blunt New Englander! I have known a "blunt New Englander" to give a home-thrust couched in satire the keenest and most subtle, and which came as naturally as his very breath.

In all my experience I fail to recall a single instance of such a conversation which has not been characterized by some rare bit of homely wisdom, some rich outcropping of mother-wit, or remarkable development of unique personality. Sometimes, to be sure, "a grain among chaff," but more often a continuous stream of bursting bubbles of individual character, almost worthy of stenographic reproduction in its entirety. The dialect is always fascinating; and while I would not detract one jot from the rare humor of many of its sentiments, it must be admitted that they often seem to lose half their sparkle when deprived of their quaint setting, and transferred to a page of type. For it is not alone the dialect; there is the peculiar inflection and intonation, that queer, low-down "*ga hunk!*" inimitable and indescribably funny, and, added to these, gestures so remarkable and unexpected that, after all, when written, it seems folly to depict one phase of all this character, and leave out perforce so much else that is necessary to enforce it and give it true vitality.

But, while the eye has been charmed by the constant freshness and variety of these way-side pictures, there is another subtle influence which has softly stolen upon our senses. They have felt its touch and heard its music while we listened almost unaware. It is the medley of that ever-present hum of rural life, whose harmony floats in the air we breathe, and brings new melody with every passing breeze. Perhaps the ringing beats of some far-distant scythe, wafted but for a moment, and then lost again, or the "cock's shrill clarion" far away. Now it is the clinking wheel of some busy mower or reaper, bringing with it a

welcome whiff from the scented field, or, again, the mellow cooing of the doves upon some neighboring roof — a continuous roundelay, sustained and borne along upon a soft, sweet undertone of mingled murmuring leaves, the hum of bees, and cricket-songs, and twitterings of a thousand swallows, all united in one perpetual chord of jubilee. And to us "who in sad cities dwell," what a charming contrast it all is from



A WELCOME SIGNAL.

that overwhelming discord of the teeming life and whirl of the great metropolis, with its perpetual rumbling traffic stirring our very foundations, and still lingering in one's ears; its muffled mutterings of manufactures, and rattling presses, and quivering pulsations of its great chaos of machinery; and, beneath all this significance of prosperity, its grim records of strife and crime, its life-battles lost and won, its fierce and tireless warfare of competition, and the feverish desperation of its thousands upon thousands of human souls in that great unceasing struggle for existence!

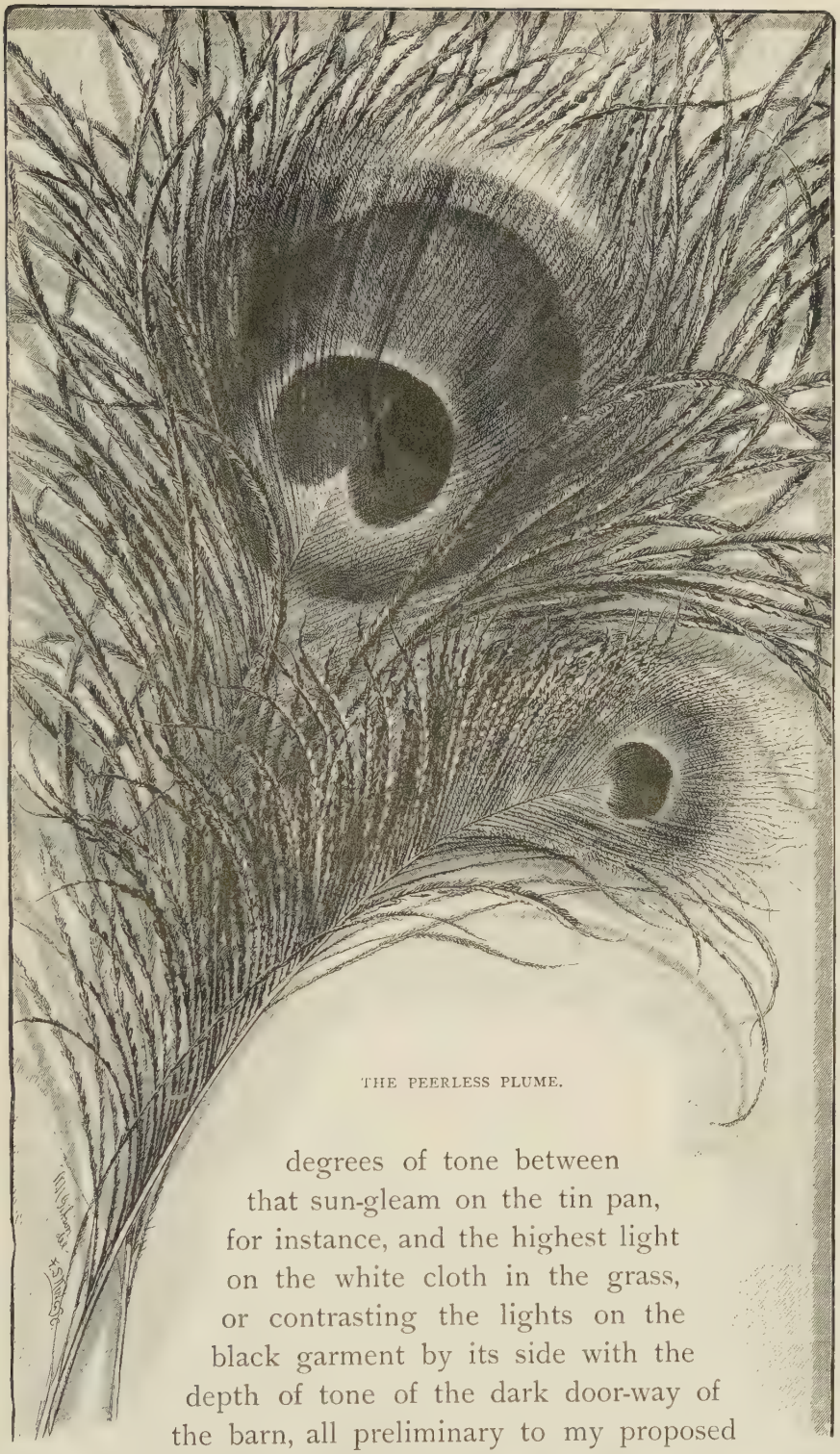
How soothing the quiet peace of this New England road! How pleasantly sounds its slightest voice of liberty! Even this unmusical,

sleepy grunt from the old way-side pig-pen has in it a welcome element of contentment. But we will stop there. That is all that can be said of it. We will take its significance for what it is worth, and look no farther for its verity, for there is another more inviting picture near.

See this long bouquet of "bouncing Bet," stramonium, and tansy that follows along the foundations of this old gray barn, and that graceful, swaying shadow of the plumy golden-rod gliding to and fro upon the sunny boards! Now we hear the cackling of a hen behind those boards, and we know she is flying from that snug stolen hollow in the hay-mow. Now comes the lowing of the imprisoned cow, answering an echo of sympathy from some neighboring barn.

And hark how the very timbers of that old barn seem tuned in unison with that call! how they seem to hold and prolong the sound, until it is lost in the perpetual chorus! Perhaps a great ado among some flock of ducks. You hear the gurgling rattle of that scolding drake, and can almost see his waddle, and the barking dog which is giving him such a lively chase. And what is this? The scraping of a pan, that magic signal at whose bidding all barn-yard feuds and quarrels are dispelled, at which the waddling ducks, the husky, hissing geese, and motley hens unite in a stampede of mutuality and a chorus of unanimity. The regal peacock and the cantankerous Shanghai meet on common ground at the scraping of the pan; and even his majesty the lordly gobbler for a moment forgets his dignity, and condescends to mingle with the crowd, and even soil his plumage by an actual jostle against that resplendent train, those peerless plumes, at whose rival beauty he is even yet so blue in the face. The flock of pigeons, too, whose whistling wings betray their coming, have heard that welcome note far up among the clouds, and presently we see their nodding heads among the pell-mell scramble.

I remember in one of my Trumbull sketching rambles stopping on the road and witnessing some such scene as this. It was in one of those picturesque old door-yards, with its glittering tins, its coops, its bleaching clothes; its strings of dried apples festooned against the sunny clapboards, and rows of half-colored tomatoes ripening on the window-sills, and a hundred other equally insignificant things, by no means without their "values," however, either to artist or rural possessor; and as I stood (squinting, I dare say) noting down the relative



THE PEERLESS PLUME.

degrees of tone between that sun-gleam on the tin pan, for instance, and the highest light on the white cloth in the grass, or contrasting the lights on the black garment by its side with the depth of tone of the dark door-way of the barn, all preliminary to my proposed sketch—while thus taking notes I remember there was a swinging noise of the front gate. I turned and saw a long, swaggering individual

walking up the path toward his house; and there was something in his appearance, even in his back view, which immediately appealed to my utilitarian impulses, then on the rampage; and something said within me, "More material; yell at him before he is gone." And I yelled, "*Hello*, neighbor!" He simply turned and looked at me, awaiting some show of reason for my peremptory challenge. And I found I had to wait for it myself. At last it came, and I stammered it forth: "Can you tell me who owns that thick patch of woods back on the road about half a mile?"

He turned the right side of his face toward me, with a slight forward inclination, as though to listen with his best ear, while a one-sided squint lifted up one cheek, completely closing the eye, and at the same time disclosing to view through his scanty gray mustache two long eye-teeth, the only visible dental ornaments of which he was possessed.

The amount of facial expression capable of being conveyed by the human teeth increases in an inverse ratio to their number; and while it is usually a gain in quantity at the expense of quality, I have known a single tooth to do more duty in this respect than lay within the possibilities of a whole mouthful. Such was the case in the instance of the present individual. He stood in this position without moving a muscle for fully half a minute, and then broke silence in this wise, "Hă-ă-ă-ă!?"

I know of no other way adequately to suggest the peculiar intonation and inflection of this typical New England query. Imagine a man with a drawling nasal voice, who for about ten seconds has been striving to pronounce the word "hang," and whose breath gives out before he can reach the *g*, and it will in a measure suggest the character of this sound, which for some reason seems almost inseparable from a squint or some distortion of the face.

"I was asking if you could tell me who owned those very old woods back on the road?" I repeated.

"Sure 'nuff—sure 'nuff," replied he, approaching me with a disjointed, limping gait, with every footstep giving out a soggy wheeze from his old wet boots. "Yeu mean them ar *pines* a piece daown the road yender?" continued he, indicating the direction with the open blade of a huge jack-knife which he held.

"Precisely. Do you know who owns them?"

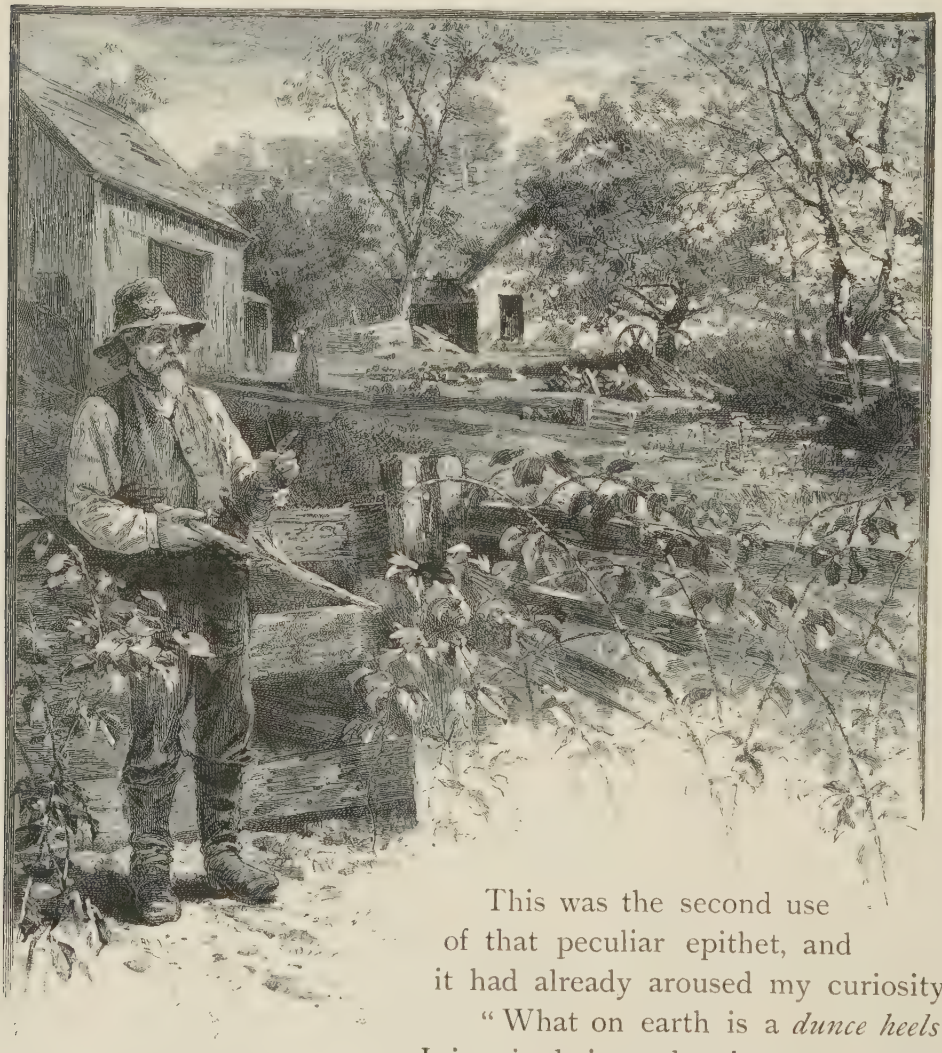
"W,a'al, yis; shudn't wunder ef I did," he drawled, resuming with a satisfied and self-important air—"shudn't wunder ef I did. This 'ere indiwidooal owns 'um ez much ez ennybody, but et present reck-'nin' they ain't nobody in taown but wut owns 'um. I never *see* sech goin's-on ez they iz abaout thet ar piece o' graound. Ye see," continued he, settling down an inch or two as he stood, and emphasizing his remarks by a sort of double baton movement with his jack-knife-blade and outstretched finger—"ye see, my *gran*'ther wuz the 'riginal owner on't, 'n' he gut it in trade from old Squire Nathan Sanford, who gut it d'rect from the Sharrapaug Injins; 'n' he gut the *deed*, teu, with all the Injins' marks 'n' sines 'n' sech onto it.—But darn his picter! the pesky old fool!—Naow, look eeah: I don't make no bones abaout my 'pinion o' my gran'ther, 'n' everybody *knows* on't: he wuz nuthin' but a reg'lar old *dunce heels*, 'n' thet's the treuth on't. But thar! he's ded 'n' gone, poor feller, 'n' I ain't agoin' to say nuthin' agin the ded;" and a look of penitence would seem to close in around those two teeth. "But, ye see, he held thet ar deed, 'n' the pesky old fool never knowed enuff to git it recorded, 'n' wuz so 'tarnal shif'less thet he ended in goin' 'n' losin' on't, er hidin' on't, er suthin'; leastwise they hain't never seen hide ner hair on't sence, 'n' they hez bin more spiteful quarrellin' 'n' fitin' cum by thet consarned idjit then hiz hide wuz wuth. But thar!" said he, after a moment's hesitation, with the same look of pseudo-penitence lurking behind that thin mustache, "he's ded 'n' gone, poor feller, 'n' I ain't one o' them az iz goin' to say anythin' agin the ded."

During this latter refrain I had noticed that his eyes were restlessly scanning the ground around where he stood, when suddenly, in a marvellous fashion, he hung himself over the top of the tall picket-fence, and picked up something on the ground outside. It was a long pine stick lying at the edge of the road, with one end embedded in a mud-puddle. He turned it over, looked at it as if in deep thought, wiped the muddy end in his long gray hair, and finished the process on his shirt-sleeve, and then with his newly-ground blade took off one long, thin, curling shaving along its entire length.

"That was rather unfortunate for his descendants, I should imagine?" suggested I, resuming.

"Unfortnit! shudn't wunder ef it wuz. 'Twas a 'tarnal sight wuss: 'twas a cu'ss, thet's wut it wuz. Thet ar piece mite 'a bin a putty prop'ty fer sum 'un; but naow haow is't? Wy, the only legicy wut

thet old fool hez left iz a pesky shindig ez keeps this 'ere taown a-fitin' the hull year roun'. I vaow, he wuz a reg'lar old *dunce heels*, thet's wut he wuz; he wa'n't good fer nuthin' nohaow."



ENOCH EMMONS.

This was the second use of that peculiar epithet, and it had already aroused my curiosity.

"What on earth is a *dunce heels?*" I inquired, in order better to understand its significance.

At this query he came along the fence in silence, with a loose, limping gait, and with his finger raised in evident thought as to how best explain the term; and the eager alacrity with which he threw his long leg over those bars and landed himself on the other side showed conclusively that he had solved the problem.

"Wa'al, naow," he resumed, slowly, leaning back against the bars,

and drawing in his vertebræ about six inches, "I take it a *dunce* iz a feller wut hain't gut no brains into 'im, ain't he?"

I assented.

"Ver' good. Wa'al, then, a dunce iz bad enuff, fer grashis sake, 'n' wen ye git daown teu his *heels*—I cal'late a dunce's *heel* iz abaout ez low ez yeu kin *git*, ain't it?—'nless he wuz a-standin' on his hed—but, gudness 'n' treuth! this ar preshis gran'ther o' mine cud 'a swopped 'n' never known the difference 'ntil he eum teu his hat. But *thar!* he's ded 'n' gone, poor feller, 'n' I ain't one o' them ez iz goin' teu quarrel with the ded. But ye see they wa'n't nobody in taown but wut hated the old rarskle, 'n' them ez didn't I swaou they wuz them kind ez orter bin in jail. Lie! Gret *Grimes!* haow he wud lie! I don't blame ye fer laffin', stranger, but I wisht yeu cud 'a seen him yerself. But *thar!*" he added, deprecatingly, with uplifted hand, "I ain't agoin' to say nothin' agin 'im; he's ded this twenty year, 'n' hez hed his fin'l reck-'nin', I hain't a daoubt, 'n' 'tain't fer *me* teu be a-rakin' uv 'im up."

"My friend," said I, grasping an opportune occasion for a little home-missionary work, and with a latent hope, perhaps, of drawing out some racy moral developments, "there's an old Latin saying which goes in this wise, '*De mortuis nil nisi bonum.*' Did you ever hear it?"

"Wut is't?" queried he, eagerly, with that same one-sided squint and tilted ear. "Jest say thet ar agin, will ye?"

I repeated the quotation, and asked again if he ever heard it.

"Yis, I hev," answered he immediately, much to my surprise, for I had anticipated the probable necessity of its translation. "I thort it sounded kinder nateral like wen I fust heern ye; fer that's jest wut Deac'n Stiles Tomlinson, our gret meetin' man, sed to me one day a spell ago, wen we wuz hevin' a leetle speritooal talk over the meddy fence, like we hez sometimes; but I hain't gut no book-larnin' ner nuthin' like him, 'n' he tole me wut the *meanin'* on't wuz; 'n' I jes' tole him, sez I, thet the *idee* wuz a *gud 'un;* but haow wuz it, sez I, when they wa'n't no gud *into* 'im wut ennybody could ever *find aout?* 'n' I wa'n't agoin' teu commit no sin by *lyin'* like the devil jest to say suthin' gud abaout 'im;—'n' I notis he wuz kinder quiet like wen I lit aout like thet, 'n' I notis haow he didn't hev no *tex'* reddy nuther. Cuz wy?—cuz he sed into himself, sez he, 'I cal'late you're rite.' I know'd he *thort* it, fer Deac'n Tomlinson *ain't no fool ef he iz a meetin' man*, 'n' he hed his little bone teu pick with thet old thief jest like the *rest* on 'um.

But thar! *gudness* 'n' *treuth!* I don't want teu say nothin' agin the old feller; he's ded 'n' gone, 'n' thet's the *end* on't."

"Were any of your grandfather's peculiarities hereditary in the family?" I inquired, with some show of interest.

"Not by a gret site," said he, emphatically; "he wuz a pesky mildew on the Emmons pedigree, 'n' everybody *knows* on't."

"What did your venerable ancestor die of?" I inquired farther, with as much melancholy solicitude as I could muster.

"Wa'al, the medicle men give aout thet it wuz consumption, but gudness knows they wa'n't never *enuff* on him fer consumption teu take a hold on. I 'spect thet it reely wuz a sorter lingerin' brekin' up o' the body, 'n' tord the last the doctors killed him off; fer he hed a site on 'em, 'n' took a dreffle lot o' stuff, 'n' none on't ever done 'im a mossel o' good. He got wusser 'n' wusser arter the doctors cum, 'n' I alliz sed they killed him, 'n' I sed ez much teu Dr. Farchild et the funerul; fer I tole him then thet they wuz more weight o' *pizen* thar than anythin' else, 'n' we hain't swopped a word sence, 'n' thet's nigh cum twenty year."

During all this jargon the pine stick had gradually dwindled down long and trim, and at this point he raised it to his eye and took a squint along its length.

"What are you going to make out of that?" I naturally inquired.

"Oh, nawth'n pertickler," he drawled; "but, ye see, I make it a *pint* alliz teu be *a-dewin'* suthin' 'ruther, 'n' never t' be a-wastin' on my time. It's dreffle curus, naow, but they iz fokes wut—"

He stopped short, for a quick slam of a window-sash interrupted him. He turned his head, with a start, and in so doing threw toward me a ball of mud from his loose gray hair, while from the neighborhood of the tins at the pantry window there came a sharp, shrill voice:

"Enoch Emmons, didn't I tell yeu teu fix them *bars?* Thar's the old speckle *caow* in the *corn* agin, 'n' I sed it wud be *jes' so;*" and then came another slam, which not only shut the window, but completely shut off this stream of tender reminiscence.

"Oh yis," he muttered, "sum fokes doos know a dreffle pile!" and, with a comical wink, he threw away his stick among the brambles, shut his jack-knife with a snap, and, with a parting nod, dragged his soggy boots in wheezing steps toward the house.

There are numerous just such mines along this highway, if you only

care to "work" them. In some the gold, like tempting "placers," lies all in sight. You can see it glistening on the surface, and it can be had even without an effort; but often it is hidden beneath a rough and stern exterior that must needs be explored.

But erelong another mile has passed, and now the smile of humor has died away, replaced by a sentiment of reverence as you enter the limits of quaint Old Trumbull, and are passing beneath its grand old trees.

There is a sense of awe and loneliness that steals upon you as you turn into its long street. And what is that strange impulse which draws the rein, that you may pass slowly and quietly upon its thoroughfare? You look ahead perhaps for half a mile upon its deserted street, straight and broad, and silent as the grave. The high-grown grass has long since closed in upon its old-time wheel-ruts. The canopy of aged elms o'erhead throws a deep and melancholy shadow beneath, in which those grim and sombre houses, mouldy, gray, and moss-grown, seem almost sepulchral in their strange stillness; and, while the sense of death is far from your thought, those tight-closed doors, those dank and mildewed bushes, and windows dark and mysterious, give more the impress of the tomb than token of the living. You may look long and searchingly, but not a glimpse of human life will arrest your gaze, nor a single living sound break upon that oppressive silence.

Perhaps, however, if you care to scan still closer the shadows of those small panes—if you would seek to know the secret of their mysterious gloom—you might discover that aged, wrinkled face beneath its ruffled cap, with those kindly eyes lost in reverie, looking dreamily out of the window, perhaps at the rude-fashioned weather-vane upon the old barn gable, carved with boyish hands long years ago. But it no longer turns upon its pivot; it is still; it will never point again but to the joys, the deep sorrows, and the loved associations of years that never will return.

Or is it that hanging remnant of a dove-cot near the eaves that brings those silent tears which course down those furrowed cheeks, and fall upon the open book? The dove-cot is not there—nothing but that mouldering fragment clinging to its rusty nail. But yes, there *is* a dove-cot there, for it sends its doves in scores and flocks laden with messages of a mother's love and blessing. They seek the crowded thoroughfares and busy marts of far-off cities, across the plains, from ocean

to ocean; for there are many who still look back with yearning and with longing to this old play-ground, and who recall, in many an earnest prayer, the sacred, hallowed sweetness of that dear old wrinkled face.

A WAY-SIDE BARGAIN.

How quickly does that forbidding gloom and mystery melt away under the influence of a single revelation such as this! But it is not a mere speculation nor a fantasy; it is the heart history of nearly every house we pass upon this silent street. Serene and blessed people, who dream away the later years of life in tranquil reverie.

But that dreamy influence is not confined beneath these mossy roofs. The very air is languid with its presence, and it has lulled the landscape into drowsiness, now and then half aroused, perhaps, by the lazy

cackle of a hen, which is often the only solitary sound of life that will greet your ear in the entire length of this thoroughfare; but even she is half asleep, and you instinctively imagine her, with closed eyes and drooping wings, toppling over in some sunny corner of the barnyard.

It is pleasant to note, however, that this monotony is sometimes varied, for in that open belfry yonder among the elms there reposes a power whose lightest touch is sure to fill this quiet town with renewed life and interest. The Sabbath-morning bell is the life of Old Trumbull. No more are its shadows shrouded in mystery. There are sounds of opening doors and windows, slow footfalls on the wooden walks, low, lisping voices and kindly greetings at every gate. Queer old rattling wagons jog along up and down the street, and the way-side hitching-posts soon present their long, continuous line of muddy vehicles, sleepy-looking horses, and of course those whisking tails. There is a strangely sweet influence in this Sabbath calm; and erelong, as you look across at that little church, you will find yourself lost in thought, and listening with a touch of sadness, as those dear, familiar strains of old "Lenox" or "Dundee" float out among the vaulted elms.

Or perhaps even on some week-day you might chance upon that old tin-peddler going his regular round of gossip and trade. If so, you will certainly halt a moment to take a look at his remarkable turn-out—a sort of peripatetic junk-shop and circus-wagon combined, with brooms and feather-dusters towering up like plumes above; with glittering tins and pans, and huge bursting rag-bag tied on behind, and an endless variety of choice worldly goods stowed away out of sight. It is as good as a circus, too, to hear him descant, as I did once, upon the great virtues of Mother Morton's "*Cherry Pictorial*," "a sure and sartin cure fer all affectations of the liver and the lungs."

Or maybe it is a skilful estimate of the saving of the backbone in the use of the "Acme," Sparback's latest improved, extra-super-double-sided zinc-fluted washboard. "Acme!"—mystic word! How insignificant is that pile of rags in the garret when pitted against such a lovely household gem! Thus, at least, would you read the sentiment of the enraptured customer, from a glance at her expression. She is not long in deciding. "Ef they'z rags enuff, Mr. Spink, I b'leeve I'll trade fer it." He follows her into the house, and, after spending ten minutes in the sitting-room in friendly gossip, re-appears tugging the bag of rags. They are weighed; they kick the beam and to spare; the "Acme" be-

comes her priceless treasure, and there is still eleven cents due her, which she takes out in "a cake o' soap fer the spar-chamber, a dough-nut-cutter, a ball o' wickin', 'n' the rest in skein cotton."

The New England tin-peddler is usually a genuine Yankee, of the lengthy, swivel-jointed type; and it is well for him that he is, for none but a nimble figure could clamber in safety up and down from that lofty perch, as he is doing from morn till night.

Under the title of Old Trumbull I have here given a sketch of an old New England town just as I have often seen it in its more tranquil moods; but how easily might it claim the title of Old Hadley or a hundred other venerable New England villages of our Pilgrim ancestry! Their sons are scattered in every State and city of the Union. How many an old resident could tell the same story as was recited to me by an aged inhabitant of the above town! He had eight sons living; five of them had left the old home to strike out in the world. One was a banker in San Francisco; another had gone out among the mines of Colorado, and had made a "gret success;" and one was "into Congress daown to Wushin'ton." "In the summer-time me 'n' Phebe likes to come up 'n' stay et the old home; but in the winter we go daown to York teu visit with our son John, who is *into politics, 'n' doin' well!*" Innocent old soul! His other three sons had bought land over the river in New Trumbull, and were the "likeliest farmers in the caounty." And thus the new town has been built up. It is the home of the new generation. It has its bank, its opera-house, its handsome dwellings and close-clipped lawns, large academies, and new stone churches with velvet-cushioned seats and illuminated windows. Two large hotels attract the annual *hegira* from the cities, and the streets are gay with their carriages and fashionable equipages.

There are three ways of crossing the river from the old to the new town. The most direct is by the ancient rope-ferry, but you can also take the toll-bridge or the ford, and you generally end by trying all three. The rope-ferry is, perhaps, the most novel, and when you reach the water's edge you look in vain for any sign of ferry conveyance. But soon you will espy the long tin horn hanging on the post near by, and a single blast will bring the old flat-boat across the river. And as you glide out into the current it is pleasant to listen to the slapping of the water beneath the broad ends, or the rustling of the weeds and lily-pads beneath the bottom; and you feel almost a pathetic interest

in that stooping but swarthy old man, as he pulls upon the submerged wire cable which lifts from the river-bed its dripping eel-grass, and rattles along the pulleys at the edge of the boat.

For thirty years this old ferryman has done duty at this crossing, living in that little cottage at the water's edge. He has been deaf this many a year. You will yell long and loud before that face will show an expression of comprehension, but the sound of the old tin horn is sure to find an echo in some sympathetic chord beneath that silent sense; for he will tell you that he does not hear it, and will add, "I kinder *feel* it *inside*, 'n' I jes' drop my spade 'n' run, 'n' theys alwuz some 'un thar."

If you ever find yourself doubting which road to take when in quest of a pleasant drive, it is always safe to conclude upon the "river road." It may lack the elements of broad panoramic views, with hazy hills melting away into the distant blue horizon. It probably will. But

THE TOLL-BRIDGE.

they will be replaced by other pictures which will come much closer to you, while you will also be sure to find many of the same features common to the "mountain road" and other roads. Their trickling cliffs, with their nodding columbines and mountain laurels; their way-side thickets of sumac, elders, mountain raspberry, and moose-wood, with its large heart-shaped leaves, so checkered, splashed, and blotched with crimson, as though painted by the falling drops of "red ink" from those poke-berries hanging in such long clusters above them. You will be

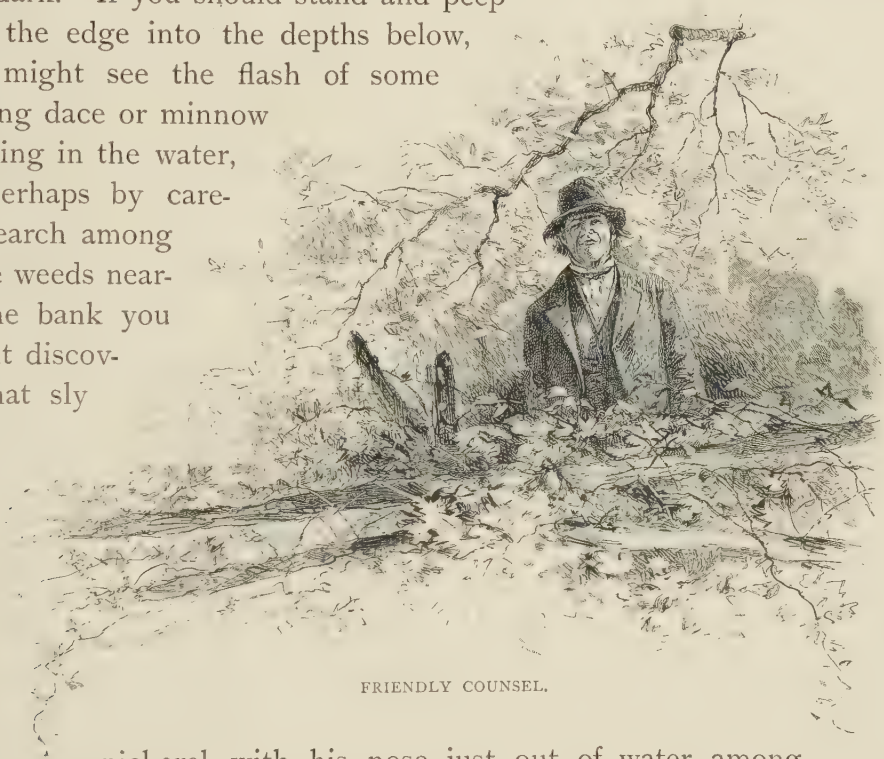
sure to creep along the edge of that field of clover, timothy, and purple grasses, with its nodding lilies and its dusty milk-weeds; you will see the mowers swing their scythes; and you will watch and laugh again and again at the gushing ardor of those comical bobolinks fluttering through the air in their pell-mell rhapsody, and dropping exhausted in the grass, or alighting, out of breath, upon the jutting fence-rail.

And then you will leave the darkness of some hemlock-grove to open out upon that old rickety toll-bridge which we all remember. At your approach a queer little old man will appear, stepping lazily from his door-way near the end of the bridge, and perhaps also his pretty, red-lipped, buxom daughter; and you will be certain to look to and fro from one to the other in utter amazement at such a possible freak of nature. If it is he, he will look you over, and take you all in through his big blue goggles in his own good time; and should he be the little dried-up old specimen that I remember, he will then remark, with outstretched claw, "They's three on ye, caountin' the hoss—fifteen cents." Or if it is she— Ah! how shall I describe her? How welcome the contrast of that small pink palm! How soft and brown the roguish eyes, looking out beneath the shadow of that shapely, sunlit hand! "Fifteen cents, if you please." A voice from a rose-bud! Alas! did ever such lend itself to words more commonplace? And, by-the-way, while you are fumbling so absently for the change—if you will permit a friendly suggestion — you would make a much more expeditious matter of it were you to fix your eyes more closely upon your pocket-book, and less upon those moist, red lips and those white teeth and the golden-brown of that flowing, sunny hair. I have said "it is always safe to take the river road," but perhaps I spoke unguardedly. Remembering the trite adage, "Do not cross the bridge until you come to it." I had forgotten that the old toll-bridge, however rickety or perilous, may have its greatest danger even at the threshold. But, in spite of all, who would not pay toll at such a threshold?

Passing on to the bridge — if you will be so good as to look this way—here are the same flashing sun reflections glinting upward through the cracks from the rushing ripples below, at which your "hoss" is sure to bend his neck and prick up his ears while stepping gingerly on the loose, flopping boards. And now a white-breasted phœbe-bird flies up from beneath and perches on the jutting timbers; but he shows no sign of fear—indeed, will even lift his little wing and preen his feathers as

you pass. He has heard those noisy, flopping boards since first he pipped his shell, and so did his parents before him. And there is even now a little mate sitting upon a nestful of snow-white eggs, perhaps directly beneath your wheels, on some mud-plastered shelf or cranny among the beams. And what a romantic little life is hers, with the sound of the rushing water ever in her ears, and suspended between two such beautiful living pictures up and down the river, enclosed within the frames of those overhanging planks and huge stone piers!

As you near the farther end of the bridge the water becomes still and dark. If you should stand and peep over the edge into the depths below, you might see the flash of some shining dace or minnow sporting in the water, or perhaps by careful search among those weeds nearer the bank you might discover that sly

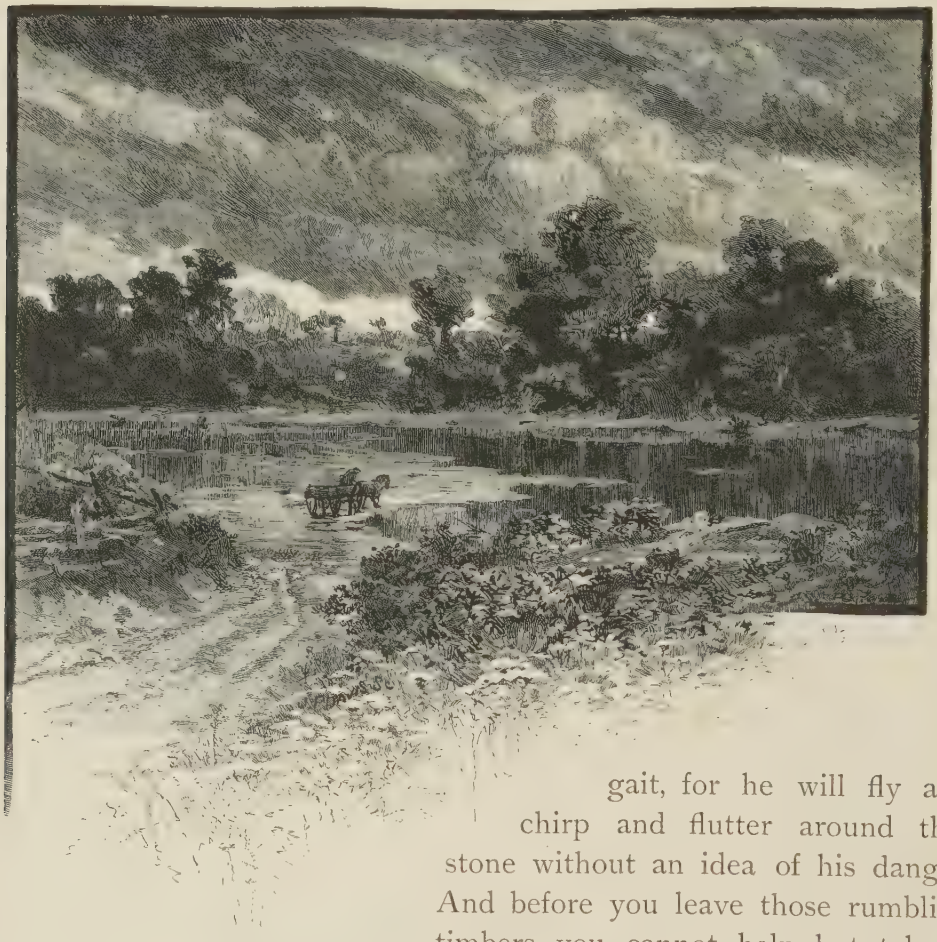


FRIENDLY COUNSEL.

pickerel, with his nose just out of water, among the floating hearts and eel-grass. The screeching kingfisher will be sure to pay you a call in his regular round, alighting on that craggy willow-branch half-hidden by its clambering grape-vine. He too will watch for that silvery gleam down in the water, perhaps make a dive and splash, and, glancing upward, pass on screeching beneath you to try again from his next perch below the bridge.

And here comes that funny little "teenter bird," always off his balance, bobbing and tipping on his slender legs as he runs along the edge of the gravelly beach. And if he comes within your reach just throw

a stone or two at him, and see how queerly he will behave. Most birds would find in such a reception a forcible hint to move on; but this little creature seems as much off his balance in his intellect as in his



FOLLOWING THE RIPPLE.

gait, for he will fly and chirp and flutter around that stone without an idea of his danger. And before you leave those rumbling timbers you cannot help but take a look at that thrifty bordering of the river-bank, with its rich confusion of purple eupatoriums and iron-weed, its lush green arrow-heads and pickerel-weed, and its tangle of knot-weeds, tear-thumbs, and touch-me-nots, overgrown and meshed with threads of golden dodder. If you were to throw another stone among that outburst you would be sure to hear and smile at the scores of tiny exclamations, followed by the successive plunges, of those spotted leopard frogs which you may be sure are hidden among those dark, cool shadows.

Now, if you choose, you can turn directly along the sandy road

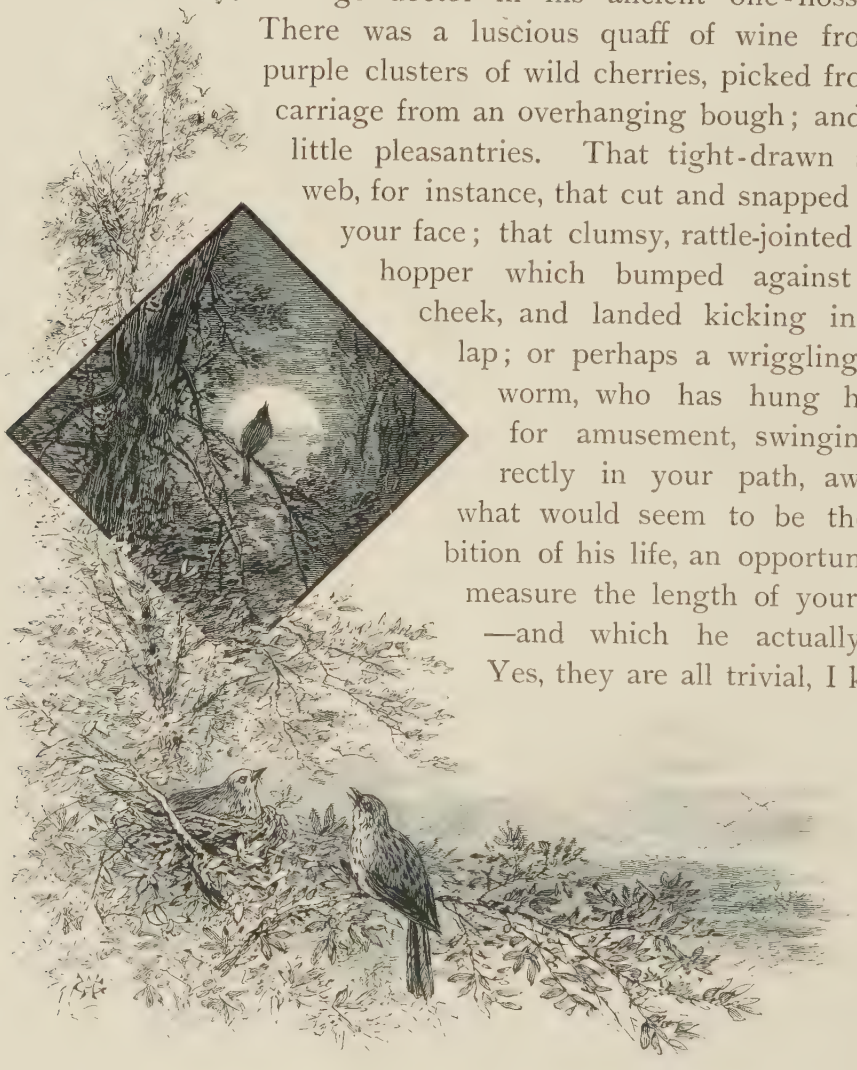
which follows that winding river, passing beneath the shade of huge giant buttonwoods — the kaleidoscopes among trees — whose perpetual shaling bark paints their trunks with ever-changing motlings. See the fresh green blotch from which only a moment ago a curly flake has fallen. In a few days it will have become sobered into a tender gray, and the loose brown piece which hangs along its edge will crackle and fall, carrying with it that hidden tuft of spider-eggs, and bringing to full view that white blotch which even now shows beneath its shadow. And this same process is continued more or less throughout the year, from its huge stem clear to the branch tips, and there is a new set of tints with almost every month.

Here your attention will be arrested out in mid-stream, perhaps, by the sound of low voices or rattle of an oar among some party of anglers anchored in the stream. You can see the bobber dance upon the ripples, and if you look very sharply you can almost detect that tiny dragon-fly, the little blue-bodied sunbeam, which is certainly fluttering about on its filmy rainbow wings above the water, now settling lightly upon the rowlock, or even poising to thread that pendent fish-line with its bright metallic needle. You can hear the flip, flap of the running waves beneath those flat bows; and now there is a rising tumult in the water, a sun-flash, a spattering, and a wriggling, and now a flopping on the bottom of the boat. You had forgotten your carriage; your whip becomes a fish-pole on the instant; it is raised with a snap—and away starts your pony through the low-hanging willows that sweep across your face. Suddenly they let you out again upon a stretch of deep white sand, where nimble tiger-beetles rise and glisten in their short flights before you, and your very ears seem to vibrate with the dizzy, busy buzz of cricket life among the road-side weeds and sedges. We will not forget that green-eyed horse-fly, nor the swarm of huge mosquitoes, with their striped stockings and their tremendous thirst, nor that friendly counsel from over a road-side fence, as we hesitated at the ford:

"Ye want to start in jest whar ye see thet ar' stun stickin' aout o' water, 'n' then folly the ripple right araound. Keep clus into it, 'n' ye can't go wrong; 'n' ef I wuz yeu I sh'd jes' be gittin' right along, fer I'm cal'latin' we're a-goin' to get a leetle tech o' rain aout o' thet ar' claoud, 'n' the ripples all goes in the rain."

There are a hundred other things which come crowding on the thought as my fancy follows this familiar road. There was a splash in

a puddle, where every drop seemed to give birth to a score of yellow butterflies that flew up about us in a fluttering swarm; a row of twittering swallows on a wire; a rumbling, top-heavy stage-coach, with six galloping horses, and cheering crowd up aloft, dodging beneath the maple branches; or a friendly chat with the quaint old village doctor in his ancient one-hoss shay. There was a luscious quaff of wine from the purple clusters of wild cherries, picked from the carriage from an overhanging bough; and other little pleasantries. That tight-drawn spider-web, for instance, that cut and snapped across your face; that clumsy, rattle-jointed grasshopper which bumped against your cheek, and landed kicking in your lap; or perhaps a wriggling inch-worm, who has hung himself for amusement, swinging directly in your path, awaiting what would seem to be the ambition of his life, an opportunity to measure the length of your nose —and which he actually did. Yes, they are all trivial, I know;



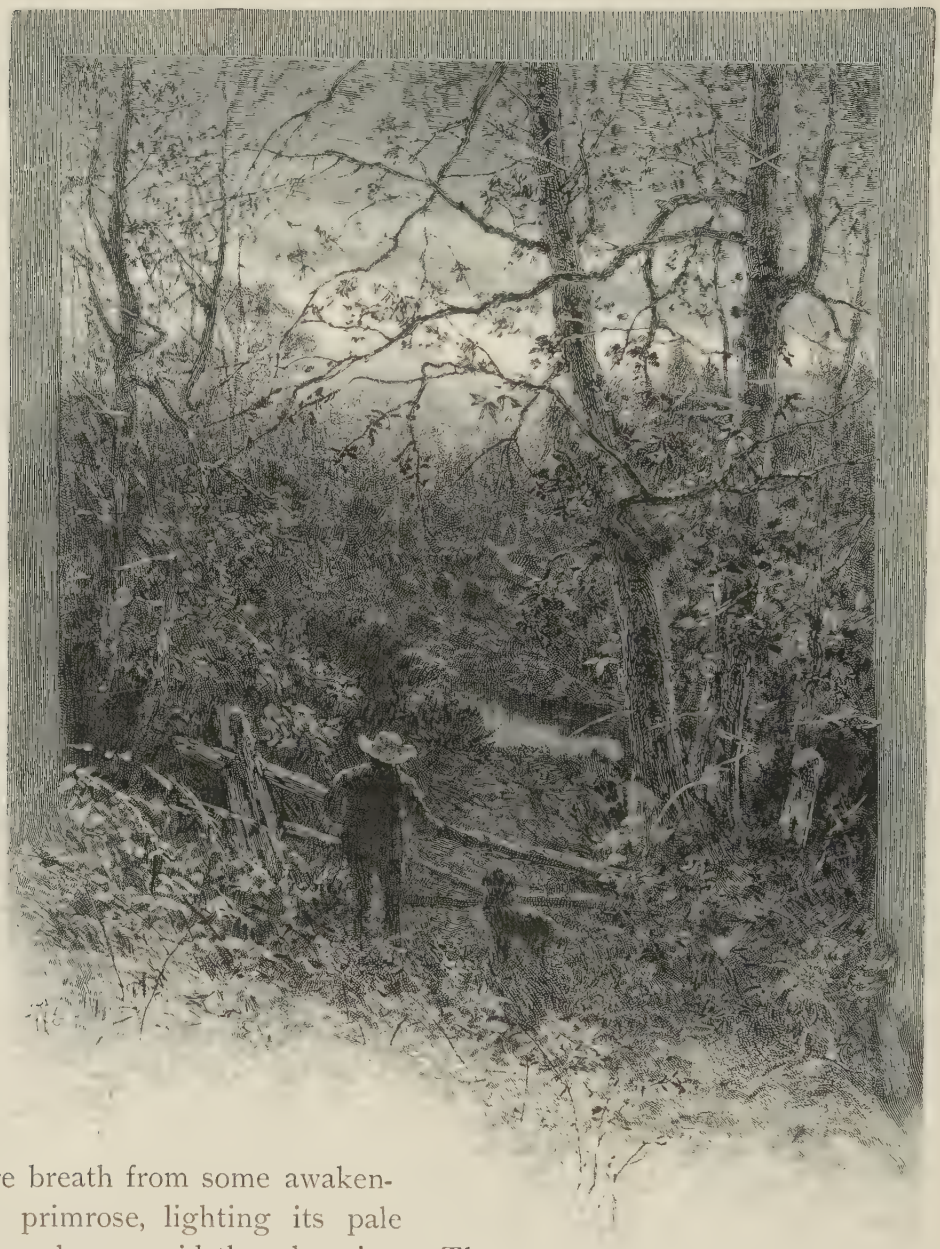
VESPER SPARROW.

but then how large a place do such small trifles hold in the grand total of a summer's holiday! Months later, mark me well, you will spin that silken spider-web into many a thread of pleasant fancy; you will

remember alone the generosity of that old "Quaker" in the molasses that he left you; and that dangling caterpillar will have lost its uncouth garb, and will flit before you as a painted butterfly. For it is, after all, the memory of the ludicrous, of the plights and sorry situations, that brings the brightest smiles of reverie and the jolliest laughs of reminiscence. Of a missing wheel in deep mid-stream at the ford, perhaps, with a precious wagonful of screaming womanhood confided to your care; of a huge black snake at the picnic's festive spread; of a jolly boat-load stuck upon the muddy bottom among the lily-pads; you will remember your outstretched oar, and your heroic push at the tiller, and the sudden choice thus forced upon you between your foothold and the oar, and its resultant splash of enforced impartiality. Or there was a seat at the edge of the boat which you might remember—if you could; but somehow it wasn't *there* when that sudden lurch caused you to seek it, and that half-drowned struggle among those lines and fish-poles, and that murderous bass-hook in your thigh, were scarcely funny then; but how has it been since? You have had more positive enjoyment from that "catch," I'll warrant, than from any five-pound bass that ever had your place.

But even the loveliest road in New England would ere long, I fear, find its limit in our capacity of enjoyment. The eye is often surfeited and the mind confused at the endless pageantry, and unless the shadows of the twilight come to our rescue there is danger that it may at length prove a tedious journey. Then let the restful quiet of the gathering darkness fall upon our roadway as we have so often seen it, when the dusky gloom veiled the landscape in obscurity, and our path ahead was lost in a glamour of vague, impenetrable mystery.

The air is still. The sheltered spots among the lowlands and the alders are white and ghostly with their gathering fog. Even in the dimness we can see it floating and creeping among the willows, where the gurgling water gives it birth, and launches it among the bogs and sedges. How still and motionless the leaves! Not even a good-night whisper from the aspen-trees. The gnats are dancing in the quiet air. We cannot see them, but we hear their singing wings. The rising mist has stolen close about us: we feel its chill, and it has become redolent with the damp odors of the brooks and marshes, while now and then there steals upon the senses that delicate dew-born perfume, the faint

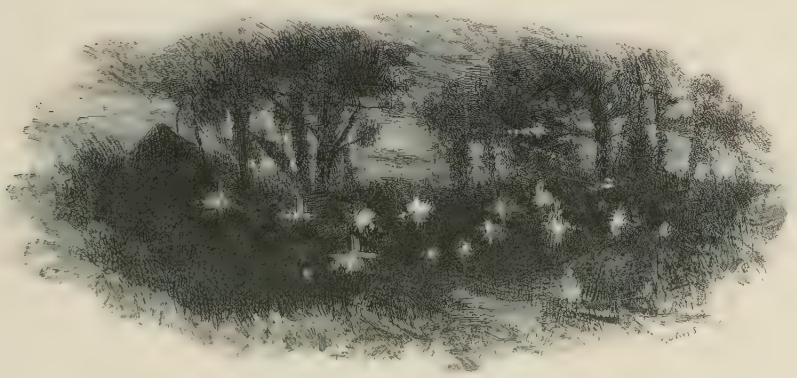


THE TWILIGHT VOICE.

pure breath from some awakening primrose, lighting its pale yellow lamp amid the gloaming. The naiads of the pond, enshrouded in their veil of mist, have long since gone to rest; and could our eyes but penetrate the dim shadows around us, we might discover the drowsy clover-leaves losing themselves in sleep, with folded palms and heads bowed down beneath the benediction of the dew. You may hear, perhaps, amid the silence, the plaintive wail of the whip-poor-will

far away, the evening carol of the vesper sparrow among the alders, or a slight rustling among the leaves o'erhead, but it is not the breeze that rustles. It is some soft-winged owl that has left his perch for his mission of dark deeds, or some night-flying moth, perhaps, seeking his mate among the shadows. And how full of strangeness is this mysterious commotion, coming nearer and nearer to you in the darkness, how weird and inexplicable, until you hear the boyish whistle, the clatter of the loosened bars, and now the clear calling voice ringing in the still night air!

And hark! how soon there comes an answering tinkle from the gloom. Now a harsh, grating note of the first katydid sounds high above in the maple-tree. Another and another seem waiting to take up the challenge, and the air soon vibrates with the never-ending discord of their noisy multitudes. Moment by moment the roadside has wrapped itself in obscurity, and now there is nothing left but the black curtain of the night thrown over all. Nothing visible. Ah yes, the tiny lanterns of the sporting fire-flies that have come to seek us in the darkness—but we are gone.



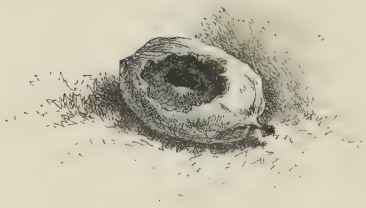
THE IDEAL
RAMBLER

The Squirrel's Highway.

"Though absent long,
These forms of beauty have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye;
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,
And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration.

* * * * *

Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her: 'tis her privilege
Through all the years of this our life to lead
From joy to joy; for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith—that all which we behold
Is full of blessings."



"Little Prig!" canst tell me
How to find the sweets like thee?

THE venturous gossamer thrown floating on the breeze is not more precious to its parent spinner, nor is the pastoral brook dearer to its friend the kingfisher, than is the rural fence to our nimble rover the red squirrel. He is its constant companion, its chosen messenger, and is as much a part of its life history as are the twining vines and tendrils that cluster and sway about its mossy stones or timbers.

He is the *protégé* of the hollow rail, the welcome guest of many a chink and cranny among the tumbling walls. Well do the lichens and

mosses among those crevices know the soft caress of his palpitating fur! and to those of us who have so often watched his agile zigzag course along the roadside, has it not sometimes seemed as if in his absence those old gray rails must miss the clinging patter of his feet?

Not but that there are other frequent touches of companionship known to these gray timbers—the feathery contact of bluebird, or the fluttering tremor of the bobolink in his love rhapsody upon the jutting rail. There is the vibrant tap of woodpecker on the bar post, or the unwelcome grip of pigeon-hawk awaiting his prey upon this well-known thoroughfare.

But these are mostly chance loiterings and transitory episodes, and while such casual visitors know the fence chiefly as a passing resting-place, or coigne of vantage, the squirrel has learned it in its length and breadth. He has traversed its every nook and corner, and so surely as the chattering screech of the halcyon shall lead you on to the rarest of the brook's wild retreats, so truly will the beckonings of that frisking tail signal the way to their parallels amid the rural landscape.

Where is the picturesque old manse, the ancient orchard, rumbling mill, or heron-haunted marsh that is not strung upon the line of some old rambling fence or wall? Their net-work encloses the entire landscape in its meshes like seams in the great coverlet of farms, woods, and meadows—a patchwork in which the criss-cross stitches of the zigzag rails do time-honored duty.

I am told by foreign tourists that while many of our fences are reflected in those of other lands, the counterpart of the zigzag fence is to be seen in no other country. It is typical of Yankeeland.

It is known as the snake or Virginia fence, and as the relic of a lavish era of unlimited forestry. History does not chronicle the name of its inventor, but I have long since learned to cherish a profound respect for the memory of this unknown individual. It is hard for me to imagine in the person of this primitive rail-splitter the picture of an untutored backwoodsman, and I never follow the course of one of these fences without feeling a certain consciousness that its original builder must have seen his work through eyes artistic as well as practical.

The careless abandon of its lines—a repetition of form in which absolute repetition is continually defied by the capricious convolution of the woody grain, for there are no two rails made in the same mould—and their gray, satiny sheen, their weather-beaten stains of moss and

lichen, and the ever-changing play of lights and shadows from their waving weeds and vines, make the old rail-fence truly an object of beauty in our landscape. Often have I lingered in its angles, and a hundred times have I thought of the host of pictures and reminiscences which might fill a book to the glory of a fence corner.

HAUNT OF THE HERON.

Moreover, this peculiarity of conformation panders to a most worthy and blessed shiftlessness happily latent in the bones of almost every farmer; for while the ploughshare creeps close along the base of the old stone wall, and the direct course of most other fences offers a free gauge for the mower's scythe or the reaper's blade, the outward corners of the zigzag fence dodge beyond the reach of harm, and thus escape. How often, too, have these recesses served as convenient storage quarters for the stones and stubble of the field, and are thus safely barricaded against the inroads of the newly whetted scythe or cradle.

Thus does the old rail-fence bedeck itself in an abandon of wreaths and garlands. For it would seem, in the old-time words of Spenser, that

> "No daintie flowre or herbe that growes on grownd,
> No arborett with painted blossoms drest,
> And smelling sweete, but there it might be fownd
> To bud out faire, and throwe her sweete smels al arownd."

The refuse stone piles clothe themselves in tangles of creeping dewberry, cinque-foil, and ground-ivy; and the round leaves of the creeping

mallows conspire to hide their nakedness. Tall brambles rise and yield their snowy blossoms to the rifling bees, or later hang their purple fruit in tempting clusters to the troop of boys in their eager scramble among the rails. There are no black raspberries so large and luscious, no hazel-nuts so full and brown, and no filberts so tantalizing beneath their prickly pods, as those that grow up under the protection of the old rail fence. Here the rich green beds of sweet-fern give out their aromatic savor to the wise old simpler, the eager small boy, or even to the squirrel in quest of the nutty kernels among its seed-bobs. The dull red blossoms of the glycine tell of sweet tubers beneath the ground, and the bright sunflowers of tall artichokes invite the old-time search among their roots.

Here in these sheltered angles the eddying November winds hurl their flying leaves, and heap the glory of the autumn present upon the matted mould of many autumns past. Later, the whistling gales of winter whirl about its corners. Clouds of drifting snow bedim the evergreens, and drive along the meadow, battling with the army of tall, gaunt mulleins and red-capped sumacs, and at last are whirled along these weather-beaten timbers, where fantastic peaked Alps arise, and overhanging glistening cliffs hem in the rambling rails in great blue-shadowed crescents, white and dazzling.

Here, too, the icy air shall ring with the shouts of those same voices that are known so well to the rural fence through every month and season, and in every clime — those rollicking testimonies so quaintly pictured in that squirrel hunt of nearly three hundred years ago; for squirrels were squirrels then as now, as "boyes" were always boys. In proof whereof I find among the pastoral poems of William Browne this graphic picture, presumably the closing scene of an old-time lively chase along the fence row:

"Then, as a nimble squirrel from the wood,
Ranging the hedges for his filbert-food,
Sits partly on a bough, his browne nuts cracking,
And from the shell the sweete white kernell taking,
Till (with their crookes and bags) a sort of boyes
(To share with him) come with so great a noyse,
That he is forced to leave a nut nigh broke,
And for his life leape to a neighbour oake;
Thence to a beeche, thence to a row of ashes;
Whilst through the quagmires, and red water plashes,

The boyes runne dabling through thicke and thin;
One tears his hose, another breakes his shin:
This, torn and tatter'd, hath with much adoe
Got by the briers; and that hath lost his shoe:
This drops his hand; that headlong falls for haste;
Another cryes behinde for being last:
With stickes and stones, and many a sounding halloo,
The little foole with no small sport they follow;
Whilst he, from tree to tree, from spray to spray,
Gets to the wood, and hides him in his dray."

And now the white day echoes with the hilarity of those half-muffled voices from the depths of the white blockade, where, with "mittened hands and caps drawn low," the village truants undermine the glittering pile, within "a tunnel walled and overlaid with dazzling crystal."

Near by we see the old farm coasting path upon the long knoll slope. Here is the jouncing "thank you, marm," built up above the wall with rails, and packed with snow. How, in those reckless days when hearts were light and life was new, we shot across this flashing crust, and like a glancing arrow flew in mid-air out above the wall! I remember how the slender phantoms of the weeds trembled with fear, and shook the snow from their shoulders as we swept by. Then there was the startled hare that jumped from his hiding-place and bounded away upon the white surface. I remember how he wrote his name in the snow at every jump, and I can plainly see that little nether tuft of snow that still clings to his fur as he hies away beneath the shelter of the drooping hemlocks, his winter rendezvous.

When I look back and think of the numerous associations that cluster along the length of the pastoral fence, and realize what a part it has played in the life history of almost every country boy, I can but wonder that it has found so few to sing the praises of its memory.

The volumes of our New England poets are singularly free from any such tribute. Allusions there are, of course, but even these are comparatively few and brief. As a theme, however, it may be said that the New England fence yet awaits its poet and interpreter. Whittier, beloved of all New England's scattered fledglings, touches upon it occasionally:

"You can see the gap in the old wall still."

But here it is a gap which, as the context shows, serves only to let our poet through in passing on his foot-path. It is covered by a glance, and

crossed in a single step. As such, as of a mere chance factor in the landscape, we occasionally encounter it, as in the "gray, lichen-covered stone wall" of Lowell, or that "winding wall of mossy stone, frost-flung and broken," which we find among the walks of Whittier.

And there are other mentions scarcely less brief—mere touches, as of the singing bird flying across from field to field, and alighting on the casual fence, perhaps by accident or for one brief moment of rest. Rather could I have wished to discover among our lyric singers the counterpart of a more constant friend, the early bluebird of Lowell,

> "Shifting his light load of song
> From post to post along the cheerless fence."

We have all heard the music of those

> "Pasture bars that clattered as they fell."

But here again they lend their music, not because the old fence-post let them fall, but because they crossed the course of some farm lane or byway.

I could have almost wished, too, that the voice of that old barn-yard gate, that

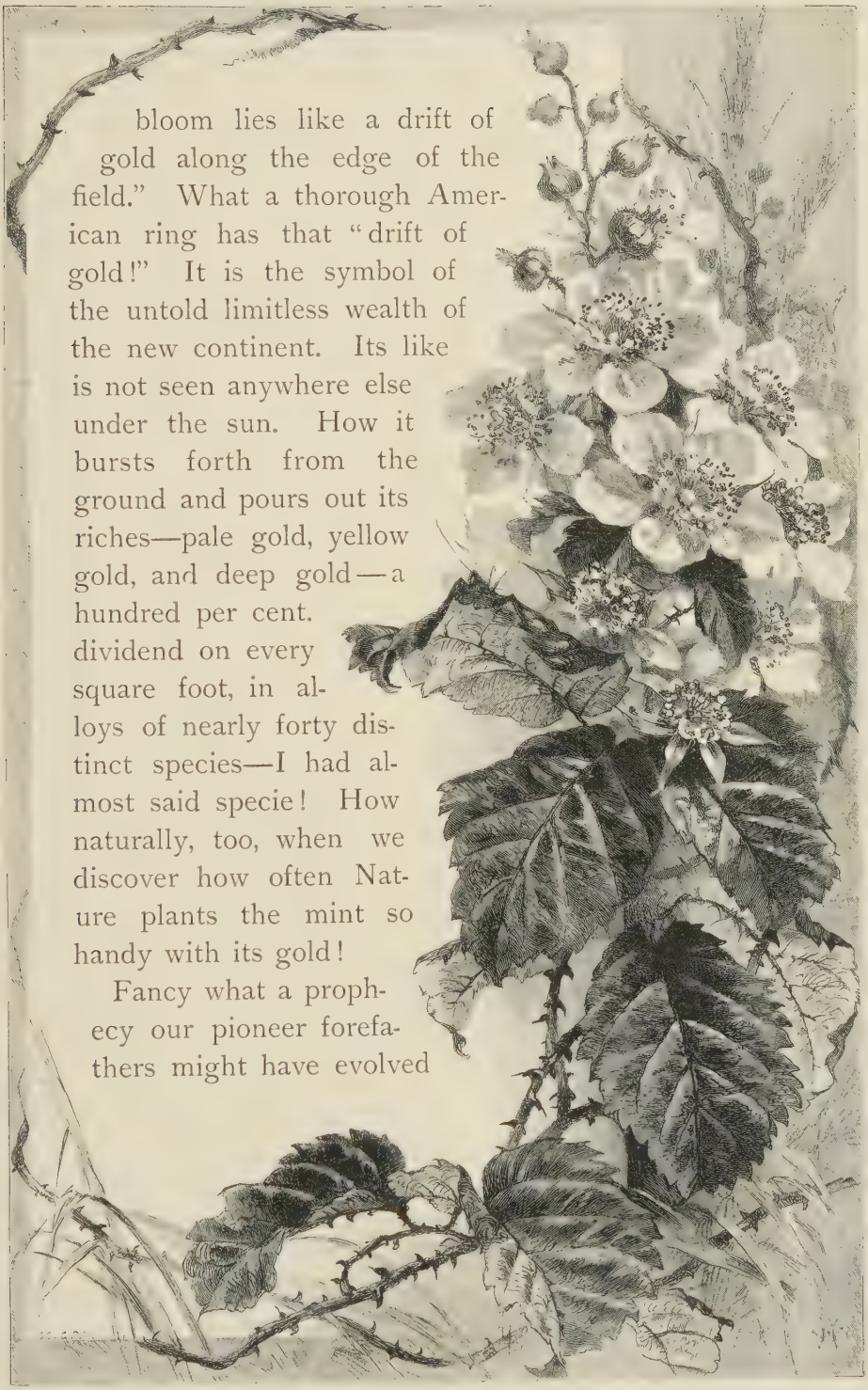
> "Creaked beneath the merry weight
> Of sun-brown children, listening, while they swung,
> The welcome sound of supper-call to hear,"

had found its place rather in some song of the rural fence, even though it were missed from the serene picture of that charming twilight pastoral of Wachuset.

Our New England prose, if my memory serves me, is equally deficient in appreciative allusion to these time-honored landmarks. They appear occasionally as barriers in an otherwise unbroken stroll or ramble, and apparently are made for no other purpose than to climb over or even to sit down upon. I can recall but one instance where the subject of our fences has been deemed a theme worthy of an essay. It was from the pen of one who has known from boyhood the mossy walls, the zigzag rails, and all their companion hosts of vegetation. He knows their hazels and their pokeweeds, their thistles, clematis, and woodbine, the white cymes of their elders, and even those "bulby stalks of golden-rods." He has lingered among those angles where "the pink spikes of the willow-herb overtop the upper rails, and the mass of the golden-rod's

bloom lies like a drift of gold along the edge of the field." What a thorough American ring has that "drift of gold!" It is the symbol of the untold limitless wealth of the new continent. Its like is not seen anywhere else under the sun. How it bursts forth from the ground and pours out its riches—pale gold, yellow gold, and deep gold—a hundred per cent. dividend on every square foot, in alloys of nearly forty distinct species—I had almost said specie! How naturally, too, when we discover how often Nature plants the mint so handy with its gold!

Fancy what a prophecy our pioneer forefathers might have evolved



BRAMBLE CLUSTER.

from this generous outburst of the sod! Why might they not have seen in this

> Lavish wealth of Solidago,
> Visions of the Eldorado

which has since become our heritage? I wonder if those bulby stalks also gave their hint then as now? Whether they disclosed the secret of their being—of that little miner working in the dark, perhaps seeking for the very gold whose rich outcroppings roll out so royally above?

How many of us, too, have seen those "pink spikes of the willow-herb," also called fire-weed, either clustering along the fence or shedding their crimson glow upon the roadside! But how few there are even of those who know the plant, and who, having watched its glistening seeds sailing in the winds, have sought to pick its slender capsule, and learn with breathless reverence the unfolding miracle of its hidden floss! If perchance I shall reach my allotted "threescore and ten," I doubt if I shall ever have the heart to pass a copse of fire-weed without lingering to pick one of these fascinating seed pods, and, clasping its stem in one hand and gently pressing its tip with the fingers of the other, behold this magical unfolding. Not more wondrous is the ashy phœnix of the dandelion than is this exquisite and amazing creation, with its four tiny looms that weave in a second of time an evanescent spirit fabric, whose contrast pales the efforts of a human lifetime into insignificance—a warp of woven sunshine with a woof of ether—a marvellous, subtle sheen that flashes in the sun but an instant and is gone. It is always awe-inspiring and wonderful to me; it is beautiful beyond description; and when I see those snowy spirit forms take wing and fly heavenward, it is more than beautiful—it is divine.

And yet it would seem that there are those among her students who are above the influence of such a revelation as this in Nature. Disciples of a rampant, superficial school of art who, in seeking to portray Nature "in her breadth," would feel that they can put the straight-jacket upon her, and readily ignore so small and trivial a thing as this. The landscape, to their half-blind and unsympathetic eyes, resolves itself into a map, a relative opposition of so many "masses" and "values" of form and color. In the mastery of these lies their end and aim, while Nature in her "detail" is worthy only of the scientist and "has no place in art."

The thought of these misguided beings minds me of those victorious words of him who scorned to drag his heart in bondage, who found in

Nature the mother of his art, and who embalmed the memory of a disaffected school in that memorable burst of satire—a retributive sonnet which time has proved a fitting requiem:

"*A Poet!*—He hath put his heart to school,
Nor dares to move unpropped upon the staff,
Which art hath lodged within his hand; must laugh
By precept only, and shed tears by rule!
Thy art be nature! the live current quaff,
And let the groveller sip his stagnant pool
In fear that else, when critics grave and cool
Have killed him, scorn should write his epitaph.
How does the meadow flower its bloom unfold!
Because the lovely little flower is free
Down to its root, and in that freedom bold;
And so the grandeur of the forest-tree
Comes not by casting in a formal mould,
But from its own divine vitality!"—WORDSWORTH.

Humility is the only attitude that wins the heart of Nature. It yields the glow that lights the vision of the "inward eye," than which all other eyes are blind. Audacity and impressionism have their importance and their place in art, but they are not its pinnacle—the one yields helpful courage for the encounter, and the other is the useful short-hand system which often comes to the artist's rescue, and without whose aid many of Nature's most rare and subtle expressions would elude him and be lost. But its function is realized in the sketch or motive, which is rarely a picture, more often but a rough draft, a hieroglyph, a stenographic note, which, like others of its class, is fully intelligible alone to its author, and whose only rational excuse for being is in its latent possibilities of ultimate translation and perfection.

That Nature's landscape does, to those who seek therefor, resolve itself into so-called masses and values, is an important *truth;* but equally and more deeply true are the infinity and spirit of her breadth.

The "value" of the broad gray mass of yonder sloping meadow will find its truest interpreter (assuming an equality of technical skill) in him who knows by heart its elements of life and color, who has seen its "violet by a mossy stone," who has plucked its grasses from their purple maze, and knows the secret of those endless subtle variations of tender russets, grays, and greens, and cloudy films of smoky color that spread among its herbage.

A WINTER RENDEZVOUS.

The true significance and "value" of that massive bank of oaks will be most deeply felt and understood, and therefore most truly rendered, by him who has learned the beauty of its vernal buds of scarlet velvet, its swinging catkins, and the contour of

its perfect leaf; who has stood beside its boughs, and seen the blue of sky and gray of passing cloud in turn reflected from the polished foliage.

The impress of that knowledge, and the sympathy and companionship it implies, will send its impulse quivering to his brush tip in a spontaneous enthusiasm that shall subdue the pigment to a medium for thought, and shall hold it in its place as the means rather than the end. And while the misguided apostle of the new school, who would show us "Nature in her breadth," shall revel in his values of turpentine and paint and brush marks, the transcript of his more humble brother-worker, while not less broad, shall palpitate with life and feeling, and through some secret, intangible testimony of its own shall conjure up in the beholder the heart-memories of Nature, and shall breathe her spirit from the canvas.

What is the aspen without its fluttering leaf? What is the morning meadow without its beads of dew? Only a few weeks since I met a worthy gentleman who had "studied nature" twenty years, and who had never seen a dew-spangled gossamer in the grass. "Well, yes," he would say, "I suppose I *must* have *seen* them, but I don't remember exactly." There are many who go to nature in the same spirit, who look without seeing, and perchance if they *do* see, see without a conscious retina.

Not that I would have every picture a foreground detailed to the distance, nor every eye a microscope. Neither, in the language of Ruskin, would I desire mere "finishing for the sake of finish" all over the canvas. "The ground is not to be all over daisies, nor is every daisy to have 'its star-shaped shadow'"—painted so exquisitely in those feeling lines of Wordsworth:

> "So fair, so sweet, withal so sensitive:—
> Would that the little flowers were born to live
> Conscious of half the pleasure which they give;
> That to this mountain-daisy's self were known
> The beauty of its star-shaped shadow, thrown
> On the smooth surface of this naked stone."

Apropos, again among the pages of "Modern Painters" we find this rare token of a "cultivated and observant eye" and of a devout heart:

"The grass-blades of a meadow a mile off are so far discernible that there will be a marked difference between its appearance and that of a piece of wood painted green. And thus Nature is never distinct and never vacant. She is always mysterious, but

always abundant; you always see something, but you never see all. And thus arise that exquisite finish and fulness which God has appointed to be the perpetual source of fresh pleasure to the cultivated and observant eye—a finish which no distance can render invisible and no nearness comprehensible: which in every stone, every bough, every cloud, and every wave is multiplied around us, forever presented and forever exhaustless. And hence in art every space or touch in which we can see everything, or in which we can see nothing, is false. Nothing can be true which is either complete or vacant: every touch is false which does not suggest more than it represents, and every space is false which represents nothing."

"There is as much finish in the right concealment of things as in the right exhibition of them."

Here is a key to the very heart of nature, if one will only use it. And I would but add my faint echo in an entreaty for a deeper sense of the infinity of nature's living tone and palpitating color—a plea for the more intelligent recognition of the elements that yield the tint which we vainly strive to imitate upon the canvas. Such knowledge will give a voice to every pigment on the palette, and to the brush an answering consciousness; for, whether disciple of a school or not, whether artist, poet, or layman, who can deny that such an attitude toward nature shall yield a harvest of deeper knowledge and increased delight, not merely in the contemplation of the footprint, but even as truly in the study of the limitless panorama?

Is there not to me an added charm in the pink flush that mantles the side of yonder mountain-spur when I know so well that it is shed by the myriads of blossoms in an acre of glowing fire-weed? And as my eye follows the cool cloud-shadow as it glides down upon the mountain-slope, among the varied patchwork of its fields and farms, is there not a deepened significance imparted to every separate tint that tells me something of its being?

If in the faint yellow checkered forms I see fields of billowing wheat and barley, and recall a hundred of their associations, or if from that quaintly-dotted patch there comes a whiff from a sweet-scented field, with its cocks of new-mown hay, its skimming swallows and ringing scythes, with here a luminous gray of sandy meadow fresh from the plough or harrow, and there a weed-grown copse lit up with golden-rod; if that kaleidoscopic medley of grays and olives and browns tells me of its pastures, with their tinkling bells, of its fragrant beds of everlasting, ferns, and hardhack, its trailing junipers and its moss-flecked bowlders, and each of these in turn draws me still closer, and whispers something

of itself—the everlasting with its pendent jewel, the orchis with its little confidant and nursling, the gentian with its close-kept secret and its never-opened eye; if yonder bluish bloom means a field of blueberries to me, and that snowy sweep brings visions of the blossoming buckwheat field, with its symphony of humming bees—tell me, have I not only seen the mountain-slope, but have I not also heard its voice?

SIDE-HILL PASTURE.

If there is any one of our fences which more than another seems a part of Nature herself, it is the picturesque old stone wall. It is of all our fences the most primitive in construction and the least contaminated by art.

Built of Nature's unwrought materials, she has set her seal upon it and marked it for her own. Where the artificial edges of the blast or hammer show themselves, how quickly are the angles subdued, how surely are they hidden beneath the covering moss and lichens! Should the prim contour offend the sense of Nature's harmony, the frost king proves her potent ally, and soon does his work of subjugation, until at length the wall appears as much a product of the earth itself as do the bushes and the brambles, the burdocks, thistles, and milk-weeds that grow beside it, and the clambering vines that cling about it.

I know a ruined wall whose history dates back well-nigh a century, now a scattered, rambling pile of weather-beaten, nature-saturated bowlders. Half hidden beneath its covering leaves and creeping plants, it seems almost like a grave, and in many places it is lost beneath a cov-

ered mound, where Nature has at last entirely reclaimed it and wrapped it in her bosom.

This ancient landmark follows the border of a lane of equal antiquity, formerly the primitive forest path of the pioneer who redeemed its neighboring sunny meadows from the wilderness, and whose hands laid the wall that, like himself, has now returned to earth.

The remnants of his old log hut, it is said, are even now to be traced among the new-grown timber on the mountain-side, surrounded by the crumbled pile of the massive log fence built about his primitive habitation as a barricade of defence against prowling wolves and bears—and even Indians too, if the record of the sod is to be believed; for many are the tomahawks and flint arrow-heads that have been turned up by the plough among these meadows.

This wall has long since gone out of service, but its innumerable foster-children have risen up to do duty in its stead; for here are almost impassable thickets of hazel bushes, dwarf cherry and filbert jungles, with here and there at near intervals majestic shagbark hickories springing up directly from its heart of stone. The sloping roots have raised and rolled away the bowlders on every side. There are occasional colonies of pig-nut trees, and now and then a huge spreading butternut, and the finest specimens of wild cherry to be found for miles around—all scattered along the length of this ancient wall in an exquisite abandon.

The sharp whistle of the chipmunk greets you here at almost every step, and in such a spot there is more than ordinary significance in that shrill voice. It is a voice from the heart of the wall, for the chipmunk is its companion and its historian. I am aware that Nature has given this little fellow several black marks. He is doubtless a little thief, often making havoc among the farmer's stores, and taking his regular three meals a day from the granary. As a type of greed his name is almost proverbial. His vast subterranean storehouses bear witness to his acquisitive and miserly proclivities, often in a single season being packed with provender representing ten times his actual need.

How often have I seen this little fellow on the homeward jump, his head puffed out with a pignut in each cheek and a third between his teeth! But the inference thus conveyed is as undeserving as the black marks which he carries. If his gluttony is proverbial, it is equally providential. He is by no means a gourmand by profession, for his true

vocation—the one with which he is accredited in the book of Nature—is that of a most skilful planter and landscape gardener. We have him to thank for many of our most highly prized specimens of standard trees. It is from the providential plethora of his subterranean treasure-houses that have sprung these noble oaks and hickories, these massive chestnuts, and this outburst of hazel and wild cherry among this bed of stone.

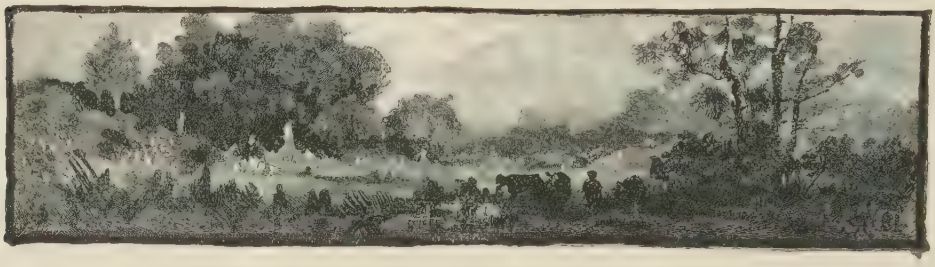
There are other tenants that people its crevices. The lithe weasel has his beaten tracks among them, where he threads his way in search of hiding field-mice that make their nests beneath the stones. The chipmunk sometimes encounters him in the hall-way of his burrow, where this dreaded enemy has lain in wait for him, and the partridge is surprised by that same stealthy approach while browsing on the buds among the hazels.

There is hardly a square foot in this old barricade that I have not learned by heart, from its beginning at the old balanced gate, with its long jutting beam and stone, that makes its creaking sweep out above the barn-yard, to its other terminus at the end of the lane half a mile away, where the scattered stones thin out upon a broad bare rock some hundred feet in width. This particular rock is known the country round as "Lawsuit Rock," and thereby hangs a tale. We have heard of a certain rock in the bed of Concord River on which four townships bound, and I have a faint recollection of a veteran oak in New England which drops its acorns in three different States, whose boundaries meet at the centre of its trunk. But not in the history of these more important and historical landmarks is there to be found such a record of feud and strife as that which had its scene of action on this old flat rock, and that, too, simply because it had the misfortune to figure in a deed of property as "y^{e} gray rock near y^{e} boundary *fence* of Ziby Freeman, his pitch."

But Ziby Freeman is long since in his grave. His hands were not mixed up in this early strife, but tradition says he looked on in safety from his neutral ground and enjoyed the fun between the two lively factions whose possessions bordered his own, and were nominally separated by this now ruined wall, which was supposed to extend from this "gray rock"—ay, there's the rub—"due east in a straight line to y^{e} mile-stone on y^{e} Trumbull turnpike."

But Caleb Prindle, a contemporaneous townsman, and chief fence-

viewer of the town through many years, happily still lives, and, though past his eightieth birthday, bids fair, with the promise of his erect figure and ruddy bloom of countenance, to become a centenarian. He is a materialized sunbeam, and so warm is his genial heart that it seems to have thawed every vestige of the winter of his life, excepting perhaps the snow of his soft white hair, which falls in a silken avalanche upon his shoulders. There are two smaller tufts of snow thatching his brows, but Uncle Caleb heeds them not, and he looks out brightly and happily through their foreshadowing. His mind is like a crystal, and even his boyhood does not as yet seem so far away to him but that he can recount its occurrences with a minuteness of incident often convulsing to himself as well as uproariously contagious to his ever-ready hearers.



A CLEARING.

It is a treat indeed to interview old Uncle Caleb, and draw him out on the reminiscences of this flat rock. It is like a long chapter in some Colonial novel—with a large preponderance of comedy, it is true, but not a little of the deep pathos of genuine romance—to hear him tell of the tribulations and the complications of which this old rock was the innocent cause.

"Ye see it cum abaout in this way," he usually begins, as he throws his head to one side, and enforces his remarks by beating time with his outstretched finger—"ye see it all cum by thet ar feller a-puttin' in thet old gray rock into the deed so car'less like, 'n' makin' so much a *p'int* on't. Naow, old Roderick Emmons alluz sed ez haow the deed wa'n't wuth the paper it wuz *writ* on, cuz they wa'n't a 'foresaid,' ner a fus' part, er a secon' part, 'n' sech, *into* it from the beginnin' teu the end on't. But I'll tell ye haow it wuz. Ye see, in *them* times thet ar rock yender wa'n't no bigger'n a bar'l head—thet is, wut you cud *see* on't—'n' it wa'n't no *gret* nuther, only jest stuck aout the graound a lettle, kinder flat 'n' low daown like, ye know. But ye see"

—here the face lights up, the eyes begin to twinkle, and the wrinkled lips must needs be wiped with the red bandanna handkerchief ere he takes up the thread—"ye see, when thet ar feller on the up side—thet wuz Acel Benson (he wuz the gret-gran'ther of Elijy Benson, daown the road a spell; ye kin see his haouse thar threu the trees daown in the holler)—but ye see, w'en he cum to plough up thar on his side—they wa'n't no fence thar then—he kep' a-runnin' agraoun' on this pesky stun bottom, 'n' w'en he cum to clear up the gravel a piece, he see haow the old 'bar'l hed' wuz consid'able of a *spreader* all araoun'. Now, w'en he cum to look on't a minnit, 'n' kinder cogitatin' like, it somehow cum into his hed, ye know, ez haow the *hull* on't was a 'gray rock.' 'N' he jest went straight to hum, 'n' took a car'ful readin' o' the deed—*kinder sorter prarfle* like, ye know."

Would that the reader might catch the accompanying glimpse of simulated piety with which Uncle Caleb here favors us, and that final smile ere he resumes!

"Naow, he wuz consid'able l'arned, 'n' wuz a gret meetin' man, 'n' he wuz a consid'able bizniss man teu—b'leeved in keepin' clus to the *letter* on't. So he wa'n't long in decidin', *I* kin tell ye, 'n' he wuz aout thar agin with his team in jest abaout a shake uv a lamb's tail. 'N' he went to work 'n' scooped aout the turf abaout seventy-five feet along Ziby Freeman's fence until he struck the edge o' the rock, 'n' then wut did the feller do but put up his stake thar, 'n' run his fence line 'due east to the turnpike,' *jest ezac'ly* ez wuz called fer in the writin' o' the deed."

Uncle Caleb's narrative is always broken here, and it does one good to see his keen enjoyment as he rubs his knees and, with head thrown back, gives vent to his loud "Haw! haw! haw! Wut times them fellers hed! I never see sech goin's on."

"Naow wait a minnit," he expostulated, eagerly, as I was about to ask a question; "jes lemme go on tell I git through. Ye see, thet tuk in consid'able of a piece o' graoun', 'n' he hed the law onto his side teu. Then, I tell ye, cum the fun. Old Acel, ye know, he gut fired with a sorter high 'n' holy zeal, 'n' wuz 'tarnal anxyis all on a sudden to git up thet ar line fence, 'n' they wuz a sight o' small stun araoun' thar a-waitin'. So he went aout, 'n' gut all his nabers to come araoun' 'n' gin 'im a lift, 'n' he hed a reg'lar fence bee. Lor'!" ejaculated he, under his breath, shaking the while from top to toe with suppressed laughter,

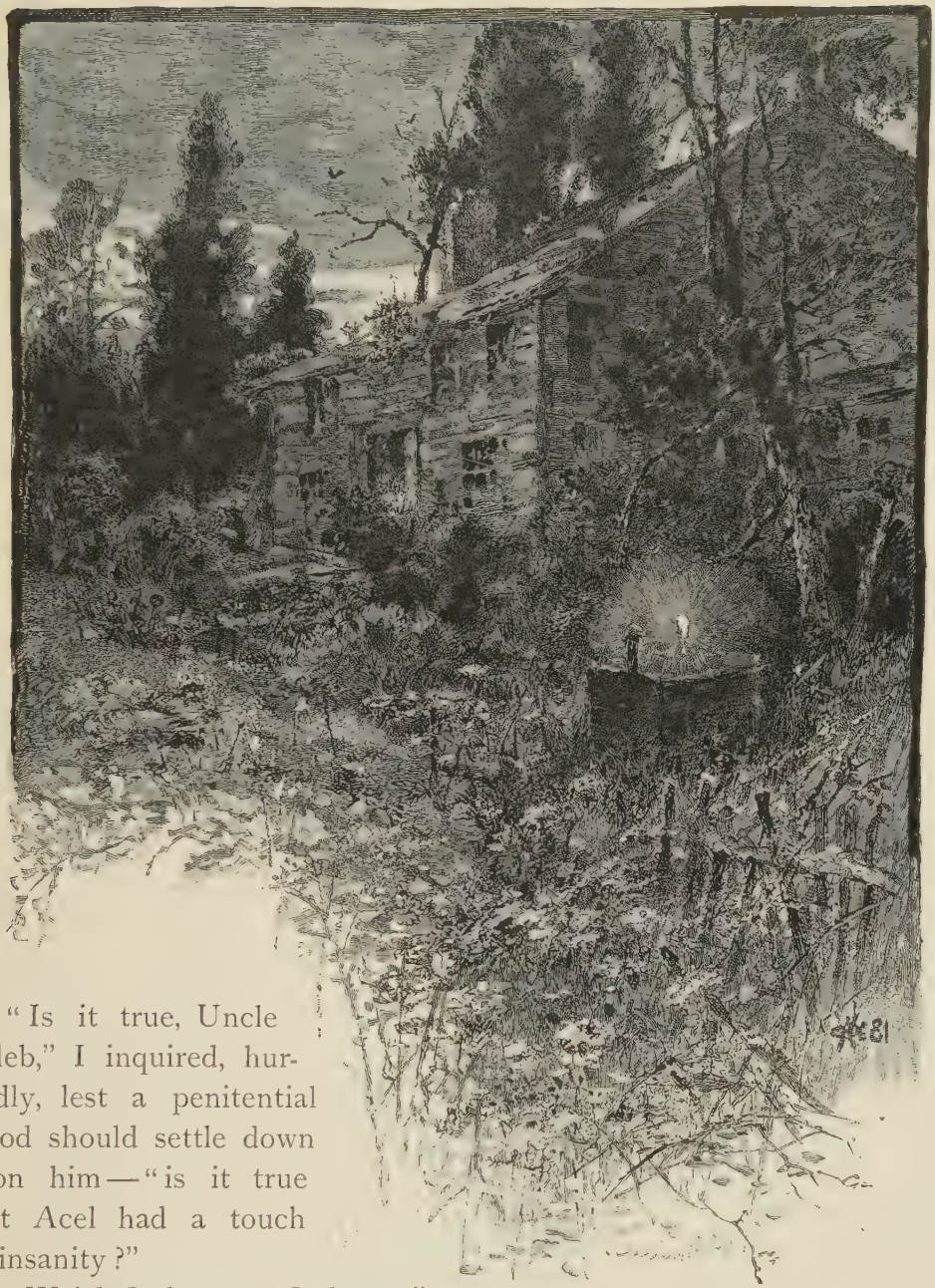
"*they* didn't know wut he wuz up to, ye know. They wa'n't a-thinkin' so much of stun walls abaout thet time ez they wuz abaout thet ar gingerbread 'n' pie 'n' cider 'n' sech a-cummin'; but, I tell ye, they kep' at it clus until the old wall, sech ez it wuz, wuz built whar Acel said."

At this point of his story we always know just what to expect. The ruddy color has gradually stolen to Uncle Caleb's ears, and now his bald head shows its glow. His eyes have become nervous and restless in their added twinkle beneath their shaggy brows. And now he begins to shake all over; every laughing wrinkle in his old face is brought into play; his tongue rolls between his wrinkled lips; and the old red handkerchief must soon come into requisition in mopping the tears that trickle down among the furrows of his cheeks, as he tells in broken sentences of "the fun them fellers hed," and "haow them stun did fly."

"Ye see, this other feller—thet is, the feller on the daown side, Giles Farchild, ye know—he lived consid'able of a piece off on the 'pike yender, 'n' putty soon he gut wind on't, 'n' *he* gut lookin' et the deed *teu*, 'n' nateral enuff *his* readin' on't wuz *kinder different from Acel's readin'*. So he thort ez haow it wuz abaout time to clear up *his* lan' a leetle, ye know, 'n' git rid o' them stun. Then, I tell ye, come the fun. I don't b'lieve they ever *wuz* a wall ez hed sech a lively time in buildin' ez this un. Fi'tin'!—Leuther! I never heerd on sech fi'tin'. Lor'! haow the hull lot on 'em did turn aout! It looked et one time mighty like ez if the hull taown wuz takin' a han', 'n' Giles Farchild with his folks, 'n' Acel Benson with his'n, one a-heavin' on the stun, 'n' t'other a-rippin' of 'em up, 'n' shyin' 'em araoun' like all possessed. I never see sech goin's on. Leuther! how them stun did fly! Haw! haw! haw! I tell ye, in its *time*, thet old wall thar hez travelled pooty much all over the meddy, 'n' they's no tellin' but wut them ar stun might 'a been a-shyin' naow, ef it wa'n't for Jotham Nichols a-steppin' up 'n' buyin' on 'em aout, 'n' j'inin' on 'em. But, *Leuther!* haow them stun did fly!"

Then followed another long, convulsive scene of merriment, which gradually seemed to shake out all the laugh that was left in our story-teller for the time being. When he had finally subsided he leaned back in his chair, while an expression of grim consciousness seemed to steal across his countenance, as he resumed, in an absent-minded strain:

"But old Acel's dead 'n' gone teu his final reck'nin', 'n' I dessay like 'nuff he'll stand ez good a show thar ez a good many on *us* ez is kinder injyin' on his worldly capers."



HAUNTED HOUSE.

"Is it true, Uncle Caleb," I inquired, hurriedly, lest a penitential mood should settle down upon him—"is it true that Acel had a touch of insanity?"

"Wa'al, I dunno—I dunno," replied he, brightening up. "They is folks wat sez he wuz kinder crazy on the subjic—kinder graspin' 'n' averishis like, ye know; but I dunno. They ain't no use talkin', he wuz dreffle *sot—dreffle* sot—'n' he wuz ez odd ez Dick's hat-band; but I ain't so sartin about the *crazy*. I'm cal'latin' they wa'n't much of the

crazy. Lor' bless ye, no," he finally expostulated, as his memory refreshed him, "not a bit on't—they wa'n't an *insane bone in his body*, any more'n they is in his dreffle likely offspring daown the road yender. He's old Acel right over agin—gut the same machinery into 'im—smarter'n chain lightnin', 'n' ekully law-abidin' 'n' speritooal—gret meetin' man."

The story of Uncle Caleb did not stop here, however; indeed, we had yet heard but its beginning, for there were long years of bitterness that followed from this scene of early strife, enmities, and estrangements that were handed down from father to son, and to children's children. The tattered pages of the old town records still bear silent witness to many of his recollections, and show how potent were the influences of this early feud in the administration of titles, legacies, and even large inheritances.

There were episodes, also, which, from the deep tremor of Uncle Caleb's voice, showed too plainly how close they had come to the heart of our aged story-teller himself, for there was no lack of the tender pathos of the old, old story. There were long estrangements and heart-aches, and even the legendary lore of witchcraft and mysterious tragedy had found their place in his romantic narrative ere he finished. There were strange traditions of a frightened face wrought upon a window-pane; and so long as that church-yard acre lasts I shall hear the story of that sweet Evangeline, seen for the last time, lost in a twilight reverie, upon a lonely grave.

One relic of these Colonial days still exists—it lies close by upon our squirrel's highway, and this nimble climber knows it well. It is the old deserted house of Acel Benson—a moss-grown ruin, full of weird tradition. For is it not known many miles around as the "house with a haunted well?" Have I not heard over and over again of that mysterious light that flickers and dances above the well-curb?—how, in the dead of night,

> "A pale blue flame sends out its flashes
> Through creviced roof and shattered sashes?"

—how it plays and prances about that old house like a witching sprite vainly searching with its lantern for a clew that was never found, now emerging above the chimney-top, now hovering along the weed-grown eaves, where the startled bats come out and swoop about its halo, and

at last how it flits across the tangled yard, hovers a moment above the well, and disappears?

There are those among the aged towns-people who yet tell of old-time midnight vigils at the Benson fence—watching for the first glimmer of that lambent flame above the well-curb—and more than one white-haired matron I could mention to whom this playful will-o'-the-wisp is but a ghostly visitor from the other world.

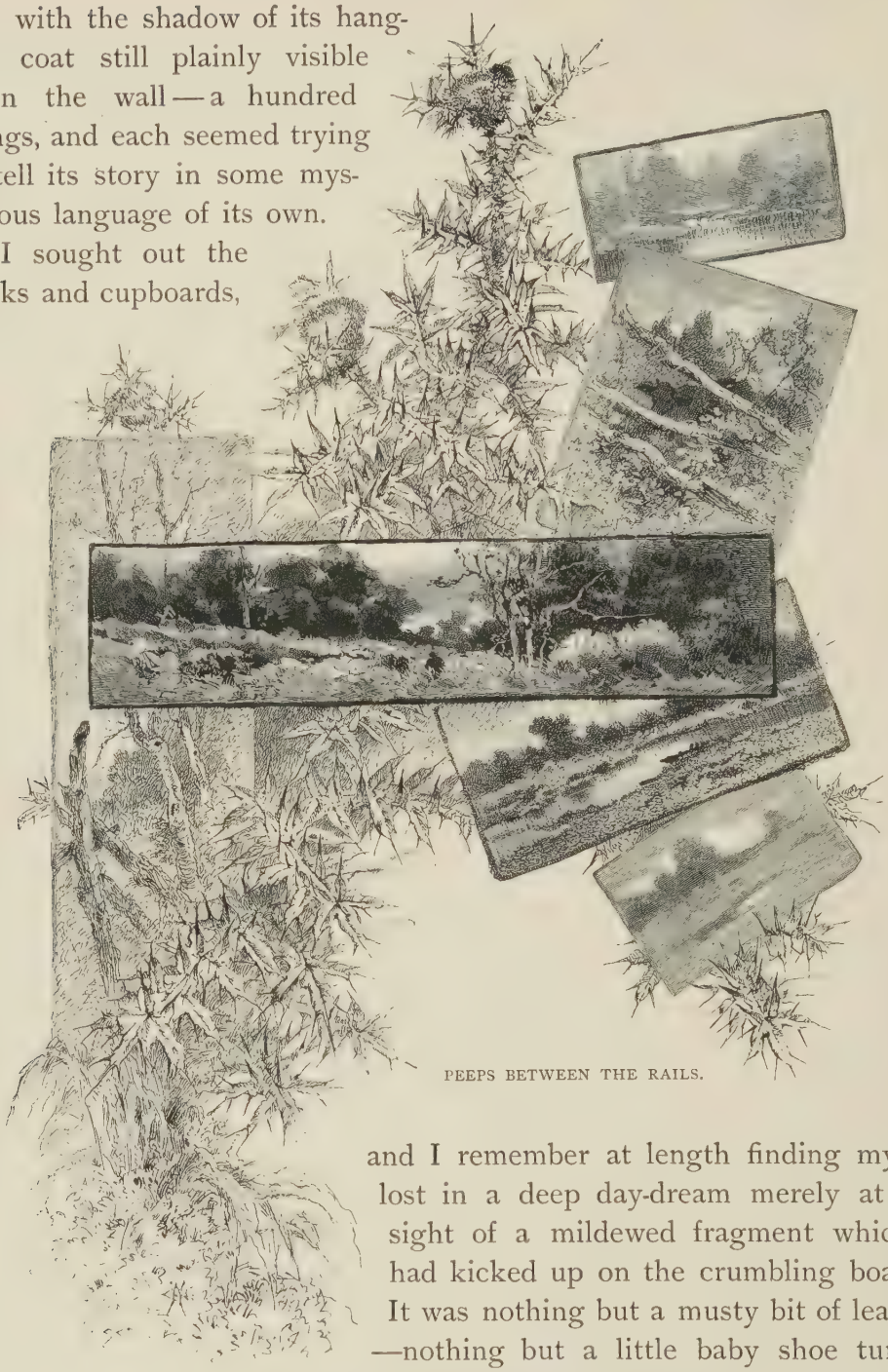
Old Aunt Huldy, with half-frightened look and bated breath, which only half-concealed the tremulous, broken voice, was prone to tell of the "terrible secret of the old Benson well," and of the unpardoned soul that was doomed to "hant the arth till the Angil Gabriel should blow his horn."

What is the secret of that overwhelming depression that weighs upon one's being when in the presence of an old deserted house? It overpowers you. You may strive to laugh it down, but the echo of that laugh is a weird reproof and mockery; you may strive to reason it away, but it is not obedient to the intellect; it is not the slave of reason. Ye who were wont to laugh at the credulous fancy of the village crone, come with me to that old house in the shadows of the twilight, and see how quickly are the smiles of ridicule dispelled.

I sought this ruin upon an autumn evening; I picked my way through its wilderness of weeds, following the path of some prowling tenant that had worn a beaten track to door and cellar way. I saw the yawning roof; I saw the yellow leaves of twenty years that had been whisked in at the gaping sashes, and had been whirled by the blustering wind into great piles in the damp corners. I looked out upon the high-grown weeds and mildewed lilacs that swayed against the window-sills. The drop of the squirrel's nut rattled on the rafters overhead, and every sheltered corner was festooned with heavy cobwebs laden with the dust of generations. I saw the chimney-place, the old brick oven with its empty void, and in the fireplace below an ashy ember of an old back-log lying upon the hearth that once was radiant in its glow. Here were worn hollows in the floor that seemed to speak—imprints of the old arm-chair that told whole volumes of past cosy comfort at this fireside; here a nick in the plastered wall, and a clouded spot above, which, with the testimony of the dents in the floor beneath, told plainly of the evening pipe and the figure in the tilted chair. There was a cupboard door with its worn spot about the knob; here a rusty

nail with the shadow of its hanging coat still plainly visible upon the wall — a hundred things, and each seemed trying to tell its story in some mysterious language of its own.

I sought out the nooks and cupboards,



PEEPS BETWEEN THE RAILS.

and I remember at length finding myself lost in a deep day-dream merely at the sight of a mildewed fragment which I had kicked up on the crumbling boards. It was nothing but a musty bit of leather —nothing but a little baby shoe turned up from a pile of rubbish on the closet floor.

How eloquent that oppressive, suggestive stillness—a sombre silence which yet seemed weighted with latent tidings—finding my ear ever on

the alert for some half-expected whisper from every gloomy corner, and riveting my restless eyes as though seeking for an answering look from every dark recess! Why do you peer so slowly and cautiously into the shadows of the dark closet? Why do you so often turn and glance behind as you pass among these gloomy passages? What is it that you seek? And, as you reach the top of those tottering stairs, why that quick and sweeping glance? why that shudder but half concealed? Yes, it is damp. The air is heavy with the emanations of mould and rotting timbers. But it is not the chill that brings the shudder; it is not the dampness. The soggy floors break and crumble beneath your feet, and you draw your wraps close about you as you pick your way through the dank and musty halls, so clammy cold. The doors have fallen from their hinges, and lie in shapeless heaps among the rotten timbers of the floor. The toppling rafters and sagging beams are tumbling from their moorings, and are damp with slimy mildew, and peopled with destroying worms. Snails and lizards are crushed beneath your footsteps, and as you hurry toward the door the coils of a skulking snake disappear before you among the dark holes at your feet. You are weighed down with a sense of the loneliness and desolation of this old house. But there is a still deeper impress. As you stand and look back upon its sightless hollow eyes and crumbling frame, there is something besides the sighing of its pines, something in its uncanny silence, something in its clammy breath, which speaks, and it says—how unrelenting came the voice!—

"I am dead. My life has flown, and I am returning to the mould that gave me being. Time was when these timbers glowed with ruddy warmth, and thrilled with throbbing pulses of the living, when these silent halls echoed with the ring of joyous voices, and these sightless windows were merry with laughing eyes that looked out from the life within. But how have these things left me! Behold in me a mouldering thing! Naught knows me now but the fungus and the gnawing worm; the serpent and the prowling vermin of the night traverse my bones. Whither my life has flown, I know not; whither its destiny, I know not. How thus do I behold my counterpart in thee! Comrade, I would greet thee, for art thou not my brother? That which thou dost seem is but a shape like me, thyself only its brief tenant, and soon shall cast it off, and leave it even as I am left."

The fence no longer serves as the squirrel's highway to this old

haunt. The mossy boards and pickets have long since lent their essence to nourish the growth of weeds that now obscure them. The squirrel of Colonial days knew them well, but the nimble rover of to-day must needs reach his old rookery by a branch highway from tree to tree, from which he finds his path to the mossy shingles. Presently he appears at the little curved window in the gable, crouches a moment, and launches himself through the air, landing with clinging feet upon the hickory bough that sways beneath him as he bounds along. At the trunk he pauses, rummages beneath a shag of bark, and in a moment more we hear his snicker, and the loud scraping of his teeth upon the hard white nutshell.

The shell-bark hickory is the squirrel's favorite storehouse. A quick stroke of axe or sledge on one of these trunks will often dislodge numbers of nuts which have been packed away and wedged beneath the loose shags of bark by these provident little fellows. I remember a pocketful of nuts thus gathered from a single tree in a midwinter ramble in the snow-crust; and I remember, too, the scolding protest from the interior, and the two black eyes at the knot-hole.

But the scraping sound has ceased, the empty nut has rattled among the branches, the squirrel has left his perch, and now we see him tacking back and forth upon the fence with flying colors. Here he makes a sudden halt, followed by a crouch and spring to the branch of the low-hanging apple-tree. This old crag has learned to know his grip, and gets its daily shake of companionship. The apples of autumn tumble about him as he speeds along, and in spring he makes a whirling tumult among the bees, leaving a mimic snow-fall in the shower of blossoms in his track as he leaps up on the corn-crib eaves and pries and scolds about that protecting piece of tin upon its roof.

How well he knows every inch upon his path! Here he makes a long clean jump across the middle of a certain rail, knowing well of that hornets' nest beneath—a nest of paper, by-the-way, made, perhaps, from the gray fibres of the very rail on which it hangs—a parcel, the nature of whose contents he knows full well.

Now he takes a circuit on a lower timber, for no cause save perhaps the memory of some sly slip-noose which came so near being his doom in its artful poise above the rail. Here he lingers with a wistful look at the empty robin's nest between the cross-beams, and there are visions of bright blue eggs—a golden quaff from rare blue cups. The stuffy

little wren in her post-hole citadel hears the vibrant murmur of his approach along the boards, and plants herself at the opening of her burrow, where she sputters and scolds with great ado.

Here, too, is the woodpecker's den in the dead tree close by, to which our red rover paid a well-remembered visit; but, contrary to his calculations, madam was at home, and met him at the door, and planted a rebuke between his eyes that quite dispelled his appetite for the time being. He will never work that mine again. See how the mere thought of that pickaxe reception speeds him on as he skips along and clears the bar-posts at a jump!

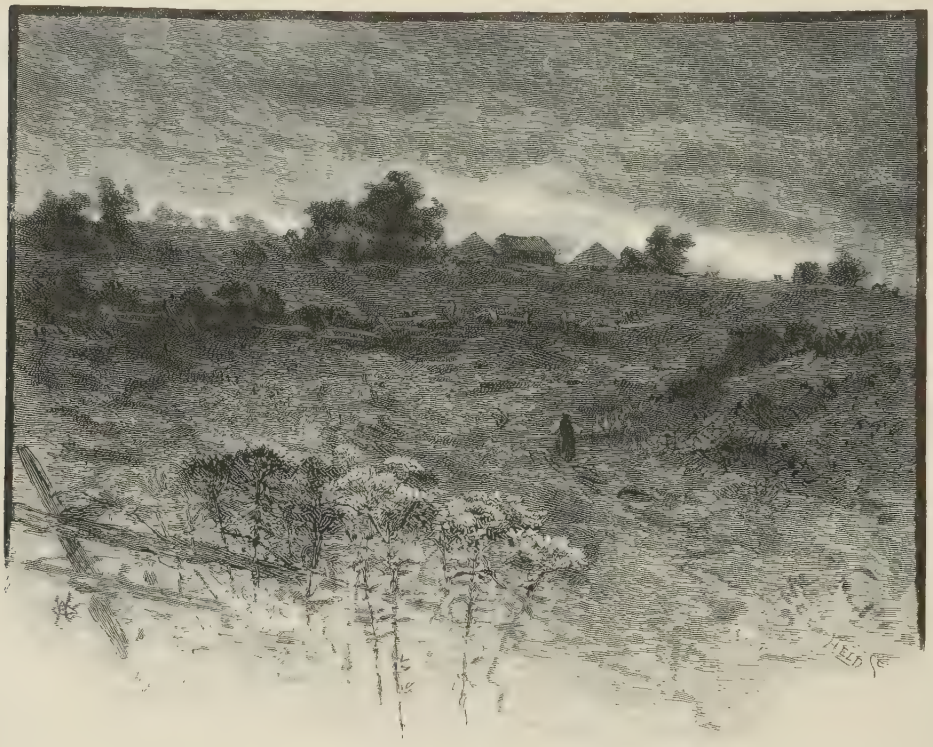
But while this little athlete is at home on almost every fence, and trains a special gait for each, there are some of them that have no attractions for him. Such, for example, is the sawyer's fence. I do not remember ever having seen a squirrel on one of these fences. They cannot offer him the continuity of track as in other fences, and as a footpath the sawyer's fence practically comes to an end at every step. The progress of a squirrel on one of these fences would indeed be an amusing spectacle, for his course could be little else than a series of bounds from the summits of the oblique slanting rails. If I were a squirrel I think I should give a wide berth to the sawyer's fence, and I incline to the same lack of enthusiasm concerning it, even though I am not a squirrel, as who would not that has traversed its length around a ten-acre lot in the vain hope of some assailable point of thoroughfare?

The sawyer's fence is the most exasperating member of the whole fence tribe, leading you on and on in a most persuasive sort of way, baffling you at every attempt to make the breach, entangling your legs and clutching your garments in a manner most insinuating and humiliating; and as you beat a retreat, to calm yourself and re-adjust matters a little, it stands there in defiance, to "rail" at you, as it were, and plainly seems to say, "Well, what are you going to do about it?" There is a secret spirit of antagonism in the sawyer's fence which, in its moments of rampage, is past all subjugation. It is a most absolute annihilator of true dignity.

If this fence has a motto, it would seem that it should sound something like this, "Arripio!" and why not also, "Arripitor! Arripientur!" It would at least appear to live up faithfully to some such legend, whether considered in its literal or acoustic sense, as any one can testify who has made its intimate acquaintance.

Trust not the sawyer's fence. Better by far a circuit of the meadow with the peace of unknown achievement than *victory* in such grim disguise.

But this eccentric champion is not without its good points. How hath it occasionally redeemed itself in ministering to the exigencies of life! In the rescue of that guileless youth, for instance, who returning home after dark one summer evening, fresh from a forbidden swim with the village boys, and who, in tripping innocently through the kitchen,



LOOKING UP-HILL.

was suddenly accosted by his mother, who would know, forsooth, "how that shirt came to be wrong side out." And he, being a mindful lad, and taking in the situation at a glance, replied, "Well, ain't that funny! Why, mother, I must 'a done that gettin' through the sawyer's fence up on the hill near grandpa's. I thort I felt sumthin' give;" and the fond mother folded him in her arms, and said he was a dutiful son, and that she never again would wrong him by unkind suspicion.

It is this same innocent who knows so well that spreading canopy

of wild grape above the old stone wall, with its cosy retreat beneath, and the suggestive watermelon rinds that strew the ground.

It is his clear voice we hear in the evening dusk calling in pasture lot and lane. His is the pail that clinks along the road where dusty brambles droop and wait for him. His laugh has rung out high and merrily in concord with that creaking gate, and often have we heard his shout echoing among the din of barking dogs and clamor of the mob about its captive prisoner in the wall.

He has set sly snares in many a woody copse, and he knows the eggs of starling, oriole, and thrush. The brook-side knows him, and the golden willow twigs yield bird-like music at his lips. He has seen the owl's nest in the hollow tree, the musk-rat's hut among the bogs, and the flashes from the gravelly river-bed to him are tell-tale gleams of silvery dace, of minnow, or of painted bream. He knows the speckled beauties too, but, alas! he knows them only on another's string. He has sought them with the fly, the cricket, and the worm; he has waded for them, and has frightened them from every gurgling nook that knew them. He has searched in vain for those inexhaustible fishing-grounds of Ethan Booth, the sly old village Nimrod, who drops in at the village store evening after evening with his long willow string laden with his day's haul of trout-flesh. But only Ethan knows their swimming grounds. If you chance upon him in your walks it is generally near some running brook, and you may rest assured that he has spotted you from afar, and has hidden his pole in the grass, while he fusses about the fence near by, adjusts a rail or two, or trims up the lay of the old stone wall, whistling the while he works, and when you come upon him he will start and say, "Lor', haow you scairt me!"

But there *was* a youth who proved too enterprising even for Ethan. He hung around the house, and followed Ethan afield as he stole out across lots at sunrise. He saw him take his fish-pole from its hiding-place along the fence, and trail it slyly through the weedy pasture lot. He tracked him for a mile upon the hill-side, and at last shadowed him, and surprised him at his game, in the midst of his accumulating string of beauties that lay wriggling on their osier in the water. When at last that sudden yell rung out from among the weeds close by our Nimrod almost toppled off his perch upon the cross-rail. Ethan was provoked, and showed it; but he took in the situation philosophically, and made the best of it.

SHADOWED.

"Say, Bub," he inquired, with a listless yawn that was ludicrous enough in contrast to his eager *qui vive* upon his perch only a moment previous, "wut time is't?"

"Well, it's about time to give *another* feller a show now, Ethan."

"Wa'al, yeu kin hev it 'n' welcome for all me," replied he. "*I'm* jest abaout tuckered aout tryin' to work the old hole. I guess I'll be gittin'

home, 'n' try the *river* agin. I might 'a *knowed* they wa'n't no pike in this 'ere puddle."

"Come now, Ethan, that's too thin. Have you had any luck?"

"Luck? Wa'al, I cal'late yer wouldn't see me a-gittin' *aout* o' here ef they wuz enny *luck*, *I* kin tell ye," answered he, twisting his line about his rod in preparation to depart.

"No luck, eh?" continues Bub. "What's that string of trout doing down there among the weeds?"

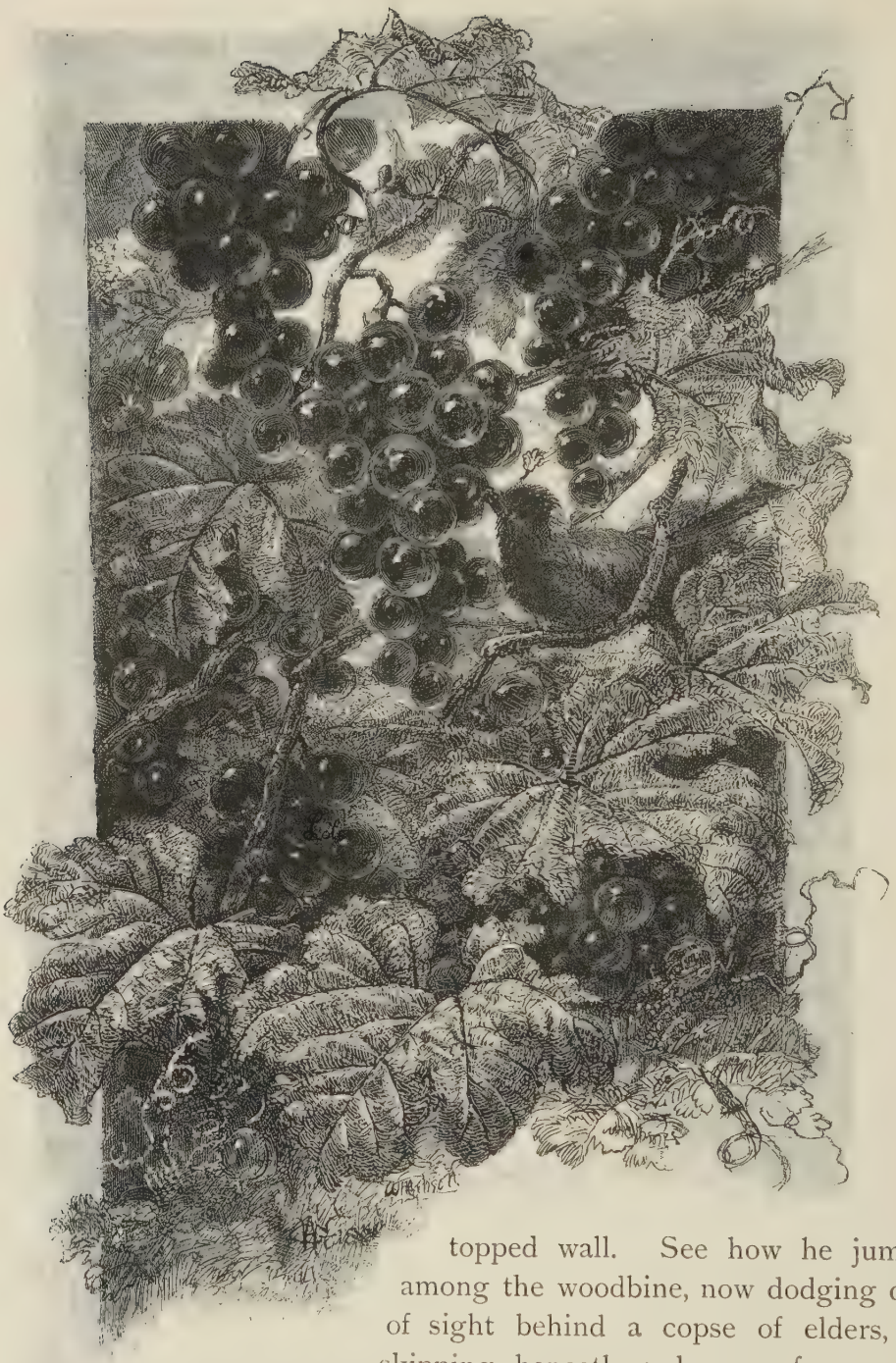
"Whar?" exclaimed Nimrod, agape, and gazing everywhere upon the bank excepting at the right spot.

"Why, down there at the water's edge."

"Oh, *them!* Oh, yeu took *them* for *traout*, did ye? Haw! haw! W'y, Bub, wut's the matter on ye? *Them's live bait.* I'm fishin' for pickerel, 'n' I vaow they're pesky scarse. I b'lieve I'll go 'n' try the *river* agin," and he lifted his five pounds of "live bait" and started on his way, while "Bub" remained to scare the fish, as usual.

For an hour or more Ethan had been thus monopolizing an important section of our squirrel's thoroughfare. It is the cross-pole of the water fence that spans the brook—a point whereon the squirrel and the halcyon meet on common ground. It is the chosen highway of our red rover to favorite hunting grounds beyond. At the opposite bank of the stream he follows the rail through a tangle of feathery willows, and up a steep incline beneath dark and sombre pines. Here he looks out ahead across a blue and hazy valley, with glistening lakes and silvery ribbons of winding streams, as he speeds along beneath the drooping boughs of mingled beeches and rock-maples. Now he is out again upon his zigzag course, past clearings with their blackened stumps and crimson fire-weed, through rocky, weed-grown pasture-lands and fallows. There are a thousand pictures that come crowding as I follow his waving banner—peeps between those rails that will linger long after they have crumbled to earth. Here a low, flat marsh, bristling with sedge and bulrush—five acres in a mosaic of blossoms and thickset alders. There a placid lake, with softly tossing ripples among the floating lily-pads and eel-grass. Here a shelving bank, with mulleins and bleating sheep. Now a mumbling mill, with saffron-colored foam floating from its moss-grown wheel. There is a glimpse up hill, with its clang of geese—how doth memory serve to harmonize that discord!

Now we follow our little guide where he branches off along the flat-

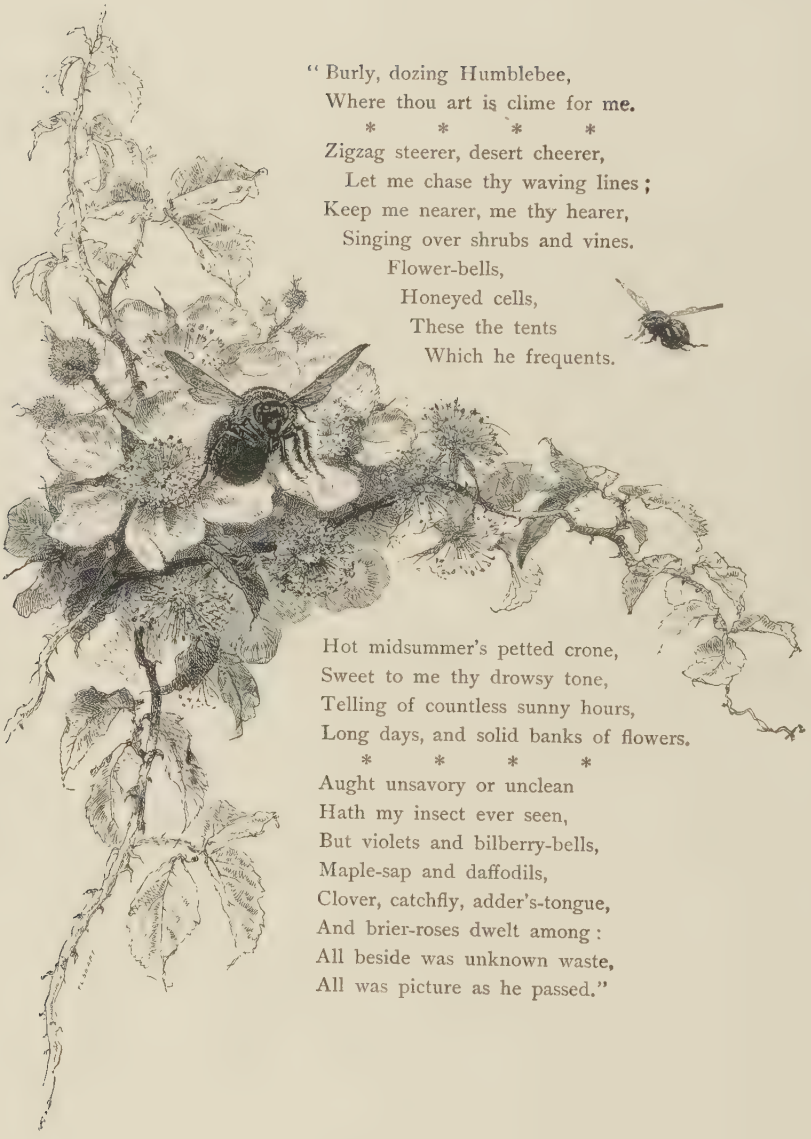


VINE CLUSTERS.

topped wall. See how he jumps among the woodbine, now dodging out of sight behind a copse of elders, or skipping beneath a bower of sumacs! Here he is lost beneath a covering screen of wild grape, and the startled birds fly out from their interrupted tippling from luscious vine clusters. Yonder he appears again upon

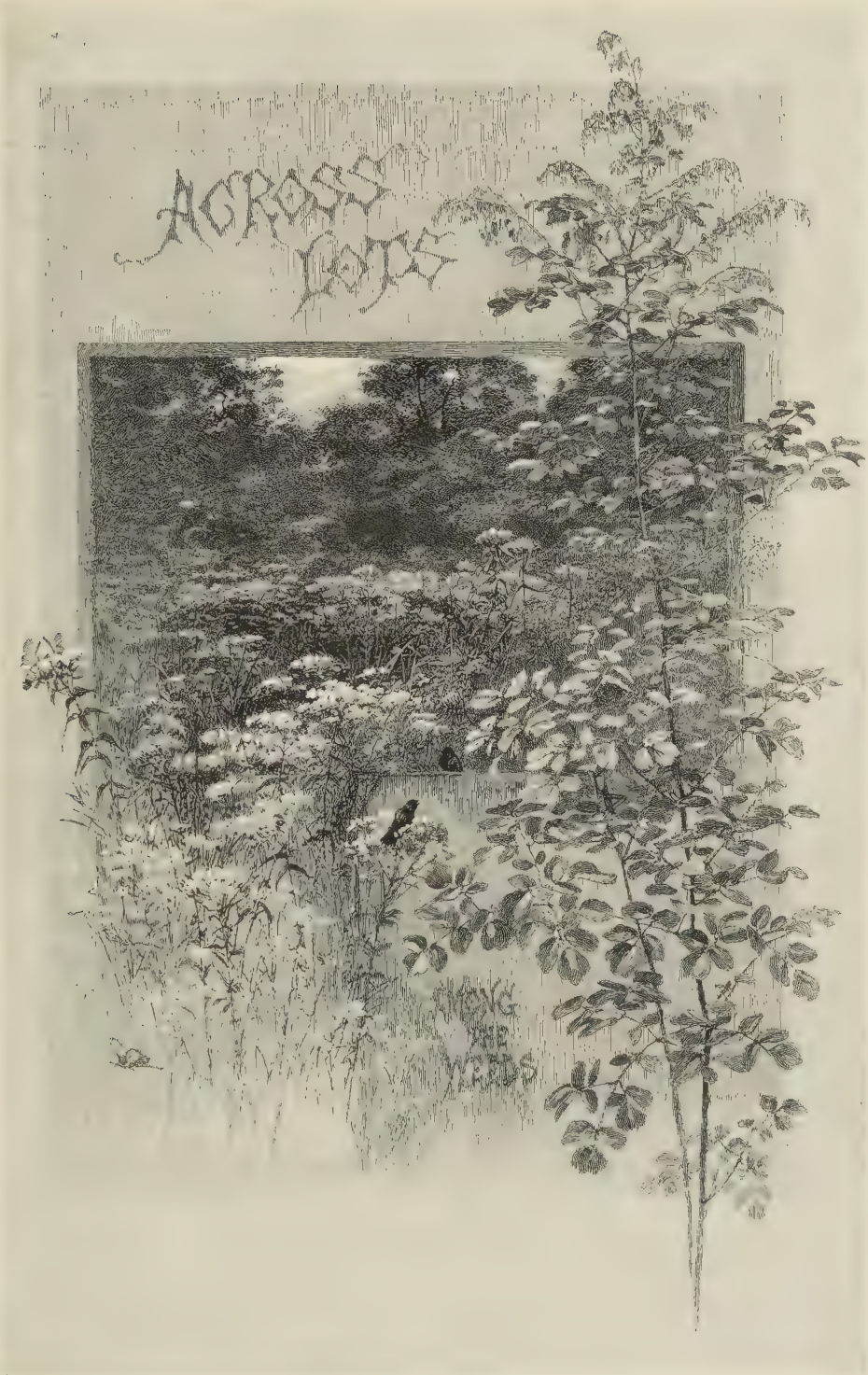
the half-wall fence among its bouquets of eupatoriums and scarlet milkweeds, where he stops and growls awhile at the exasperated ploughboy, until the whizzing stone cuts short his tirade. Away he speeds with whisking tail, past road-side lane and cornfield, with its rustling ribbons, until at length there comes a sudden pitch through fields of grain, where the golden sheen of the billowy wheat chases wave on wave across the upland slope. We can hear its whispers as it bends and sweeps among the rails, where, if we look closely, we may detect a nimble figure sitting on a jutting summit, poising to catch a swaying tip that some favoring breeze shall send him; and how lightly will it dance upon its stem when he releases it! But now again he takes the rails, bounds along upon the hollow birchen pole, stops, turns, whisks his tail in a last adieu, and disappears. The old fence takes him to her heart again. His circuit is completed, and with it mine ends also.

Across Lots.



" Burly, dozing Humblebee,
Where thou art is clime for me.
* * * *
Zigzag steerer, desert cheerer,
Let me chase thy waving lines;
Keep me nearer, me thy hearer,
Singing over shrubs and vines.
Flower-bells,
Honeyed cells,
These the tents
Which he frequents.

Hot midsummer's petted crone,
Sweet to me thy drowsy tone,
Telling of countless sunny hours,
Long days, and solid banks of flowers.
* * * *
Aught unsavory or unclean
Hath my insect ever seen,
But violets and bilberry-bells,
Maple-sap and daffodils,
Clover, catchfly, adder's-tongue,
And brier-roses dwelt among:
All beside was unknown waste,
All was picture as he passed."


ACROSS
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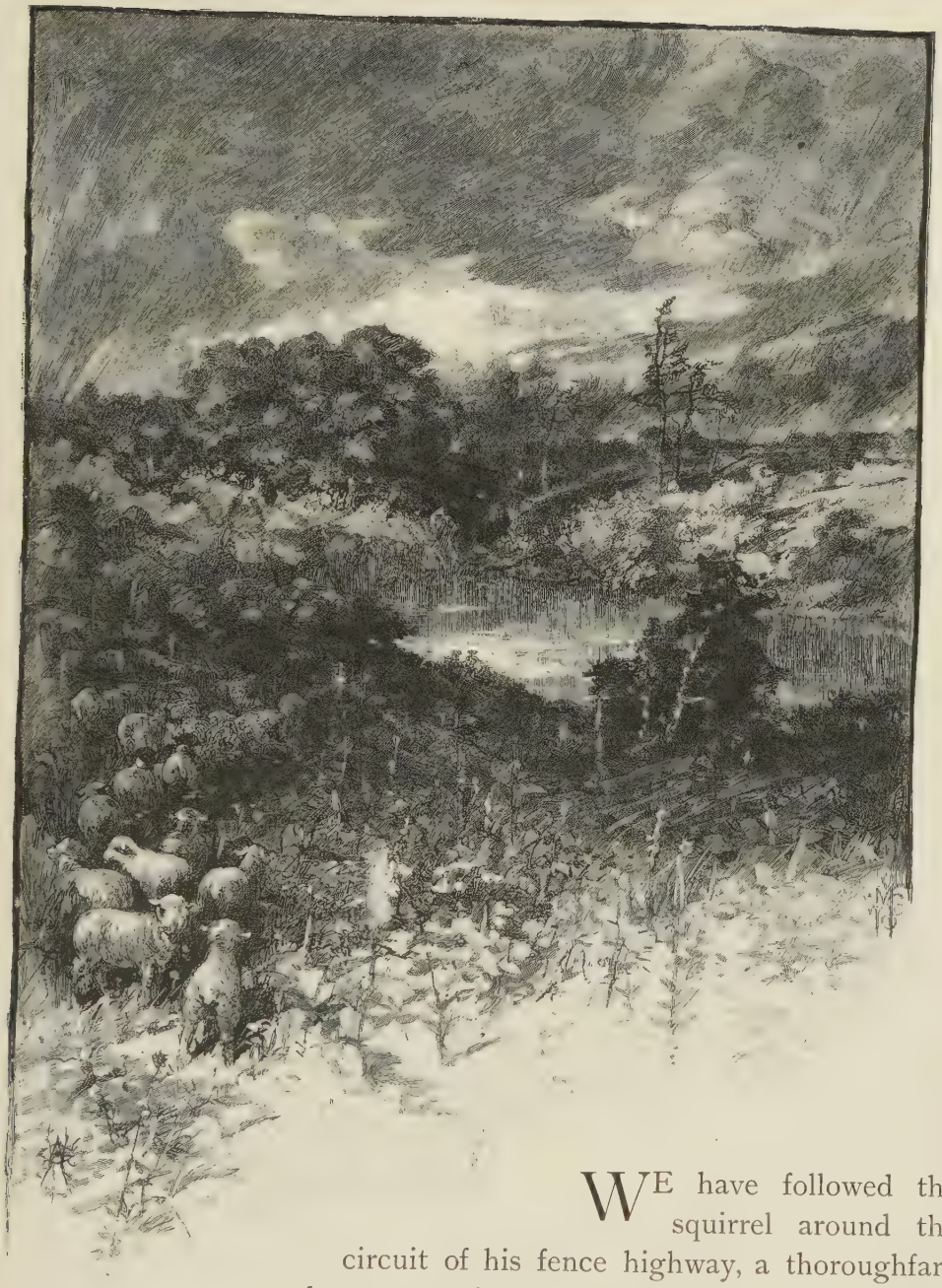


WE have followed the squirrel around the circuit of his fence highway, a thoroughfare whose every inch he knows by heart. As the courier of a routine tour he is without a peer. But in our present random trip across the fields we must needs look elsewhere for our guide. We shall find him close at hand. I have bespoken him, and he awaits us in yonder tufted blossom-bed, where we shall discover him dozing in the lap of luxury, or perhaps surprise him in a mood of all-

absorbing industry as he revels among the plumy petals and drains the nectar from the blossom-cups.

His is the random flight that I would follow; his the rare prerogative which would be my prototype—

> "Seeing only what is fair,
> Sipping only what is sweet"—

in this flight of fancy; recalling a few such episodes as have furnished sweets to me in my random walks, and which still invite the bee in every meadow, wood, and field. Would that my wings possessed the magic hum that should call the swarm from the busy hive into the gladness of these pleasant fields!

There is something new to be learned in every square foot of nature, if one will only look with open eyes. Indeed, on every hand,

> "Whether we look or whether we listen,
> We hear life murmur or see it glisten."

I have known our lovely fringed orchis (*Habenaria fimbriata*) nearly all my life, but only recently did I discover that I had looked it in the face all these years with mere half-intelligent recognition — the true significance of its flower, its most wonderful and vital attribute, had escaped me.

For years I thought I knew all there was to be known about our common milk-weed. I knew the savory relish of its early sprouts in spring. I knew as well every natural dependent upon its bounty, from its small red beetle and striped Danais caterpillar, the woolly herds upon its leaf, and jewelled nymph beneath its shadow, to the quivering butterflies which I had so often picked half-tipsy from the heavy nectar of its plethoric blossoms. Its floating cloud of silken sheen had always been my delight; and, with its lush, nutritious growth and generous pulse, I had often wondered at the apparent neglect and inutility of a weed so richly blessed in seeming possibilities of usefulness. I had analyzed its flower—had seen the bee at work upon its horns of plenty; but, even with all this considerable acquaintance, "the secret of a weed's plain heart" was yet denied me. I had failed to discover the most remarkable feature of the plant — the actual secret of its existence in the strange fertilization of its flower by the very insects I had so often seen upon it.

It were a rash man who should say he knows the wild flower when he sees it—the violet, the orchid, or columbine. A nodding acquaintance there may be, but one does not thus become a confidant.

There are few of us, I imagine, but could call by name the everlasting flowers that whiten our pasture-lands and clearings, scenting the summer air with their nut-like fragrance. But I wonder how many of us possess their confidence sufficiently to have discovered the recluse that hides among their blossoms?

HILL-SIDE STUBBLE.

The transformation of the insect is a theme which has always possessed a strange fascination for me. Even as far back as I can remember, while yet the sacred story of the Resurrection was but a weird and ghostly picture in my mind—a mind as yet too immature to realize the significance of deeper spiritual truth—I am conscious that in the study of the insect, in the contemplation of its strange metamorphic sleep, and in the figure of the bursting chrysalis, I found my earliest divine interpreter.

"Man cannot afford to be a naturalist," says the wrapt philosopher of "Walden," "to look at Nature directly. He must look through and

beyond her. To look at her is as fatal as to look at the head of Medusa—it turns the man of science to stone."

Of all my rambles, with their ever-increasing fund of interesting discovery, there is none so often followed in the saunterings of my memory as that which led me to my earliest introduction to the study of entomology.

It was a day in early June, and nature was bursting with exuberance. The very earth was teeming with awakening germs—here an acorn, with its biformed hungry germ—parody on the dual mission of mortal life—one seeking earth, the other heaven; here an odd little elf of maple, with his winged cap still clinging as he danced upon his slender stem; while numerous nameless green things clove the sod, and matted leaves and slender coils of ferns unrolled in eager grasp from their woolly winter nest.

But dear to my heart as were these familiar tokens, how quickly were they all forgotten in my contemplation simply of a little stone that lay upon a patch of mould directly at my elbow, and my wondering eyes were riveted upon it, for it seemed as though in the universal quickening even this also had taken life.

I can see it this moment. It moves again, and yet again, until now, with a final effort, it is lifted from its setting and rolled away, while in its place there protrudes from the ground a chrysalis risen from its sepulchre. Filled with wonder, I sit and watch as though in a dream, awaiting the revelation from this mysterious earthly messenger, when suddenly the encasement swells and breaks, the cerements are burst, and the strange shape gives birth to the form of a beautiful moth—a tender, trembling thing, which emerges from the empty shell and creeps quivering upon an overhanging spray.

Now followed that beautiful and wondrous unfolding of the winged life—the softly-falling crumpled folds, the quivering pulsations of the new-born wings eager for their flight, until at length their glory shone in purity and perfection—a trial flutter, and the perfect being took wing and flew away!

Thus did I become a votary to that science known as "entomology." What wonder, then, that it should yield to me in after-life a winged significance, a spirit of unrest that bursts the shell of mere terminology, and enjoys a realm of resource not found in books, except, indeed, between the lines? For the entomology which I would seek is not yet written,

and it is beyond my conception that any one among its votaries could witness unmoved by its deeper impress a spectacle such as this, or could find through the retina of science alone an ample insight.

Here is a phenomenon that is well-nigh as common in nature as the bursting of a bud or the unfolding of a leaf, and yet how rarely is it noted! We have seen that withered leaf upon the sassafras a thousand times, and passed it by in ignorance. The leafy hammock of the nettle has shielded close its willing captive, not only from the searching scrutiny of bird but from our eyes as well. Among the meadow milk-weeds a pendent gem of emerald and gold has often touched our unconscious hands. And why have we never thought to look beneath that artificial tent of the drooping hop-leaf for the rare jewel hanging there?

Years ago the tell-tale contour of a nodding leaf upon the wood-nettle arrested my attention in a shady walk—a quaint, drooping canopy, formed by the cutting of the three main ribs of the leaf close to the petiole. I plucked it and looked beneath, and, forgetting the sting, I held my breath in contemplation of the beautiful object that met my eyes. Wondrous aurelia! Divine mosaic! Paragon of symbolic art! Ye famed emblazoners of ancient Egypt—elect of Memnon! illuminators to the god of Thebes!—where is the glory of your gorgeous gilded sepulchres? mockeries of the chrysalid, your royal glittering encasements of your mummied princes, queens, and kings? How does that mortal splendor pale beside this tiny marvel of divine illumination!

Ye modern revellers in jewels and fine gold, behold how idle is your worship! Where the gaud among all your idle trinketry, with its mimetic modelling and rare embellishment of superficial art, that is not bedimmed like dross in the presence of this perfect master-work beneath the nettle-leaf?

Wherefore, ye craftsmen of gems and precious metals, that in all your idle mimicries of Nature's forms, your parodies of her "beetles panoplied in gems and gold," your mockeries of her unoffending butterflies and libels on her helpless flowers, your jewelled travesties of dew-drops upon the sculptured leaf or pearl upon the mimic shell—wherefore have your eyes escaped this matchless prototype? Look upon this pendent brilliant beneath the leaf—this heaven-illumined mummy of Vanessa, Cynthia, or Danais. Here are lessons of form and color that may well employ your skill and exalt your passion for mimetic art, even though they shame your transcripts to the dust. Here are palpitating opals—

lustrous ashen films smouldering with living fires of iridescent light. Here are marvellous, glittering mosaics—beautiful unsolved hieroglyphs of another world. Here are rainbow-tints of nacre borrowed from the mother of no earthly pearl, symbols and characters in nameless filmy hues, underlaid with malachite and emerald, glistening in frost of silver, or embossed in burnished gold, pure and refined beyond mortal skill, untainted with alloy. Verily the dross of material earth yields no such precious metals.

Well may the alchemists of old, blinded by their worldly avarice, have sought their elusive talisman in these brilliant emblems. Well, too, might they have discerned without the test that ethereal metals such as these defy aught but the mental crucible; that they but elude the flame to ascend and mingle with the light that gave them being—bright promises from Heaven; textures woven from sunbeams and wrought into this evanescent winding-sheet lent to the slumbering aurelia, a brief heritage from the spirit-world.

THE WEED MEADOW.

Here we come upon that blessed meadow outburst—my infinite delight—where lifetime offerings bend on swaying stalks, and Nature's book is bursting with its beckoning leaves—

"Only a bank of simple weeds,
Of tangled grass and slender wind-blown reeds;
And yet a world of beauty garners there."

A realm of singing shadows and filmy wings, where

"There's never a blade or a leaf too mean
To be some happy creature's palace."

Here, along its edge, we come again upon that bed of everlasting, where for the hundredth time, hidden within its nest of blossoms, I discover that same beautiful emblem, always a suggestive symbol to me; but here among the immortelles it seems, in truth, a prophecy. But how often, in its varied forms, is this prophecy thrust upon my vision in my daily walks! and how strangely often would it seem as though it vanished beneath the glance of other eyes! Do I walk the streets of cruel, crowded cities? They are there. They "make their beds" on tree and fence, and upon the lowly tenement. Yea, here do they seem to find their chosen resting-place; and I have beheld them weave their shroud among the folds of crape upon the shadowed threshold. Perchance I find their testimony along the thoroughfares of wealth woven upon the rich façade or gorgeous vestibule—but not long, my fair aurelia. Grim irony! How often art thou forbidden entrance or swept away!

I stroll among the "cities of the dead," and they meet me there. I have seen the shrouded nymph nestling in the worn inscription—the pendent emblem hanging in the sculptured niche, and the new-born image creeping on the crumbling tomb, while in a memorable stroll not long ago, loitering, as is my wont, in the peaceful confines of the village church-yard, the revelation came again. An ancient, tottering slab, with closely-lichened surface, seemed to beckon me. I sought a piece of broken stone with which to scour the surface, that I might learn the testimony thus so effectually hidden, almost with a consciousness, it would seem, when at last the quaint inscription revealed to me these sentiments—and what a strange pathos seemed to lurk amid these weird intaglios!—

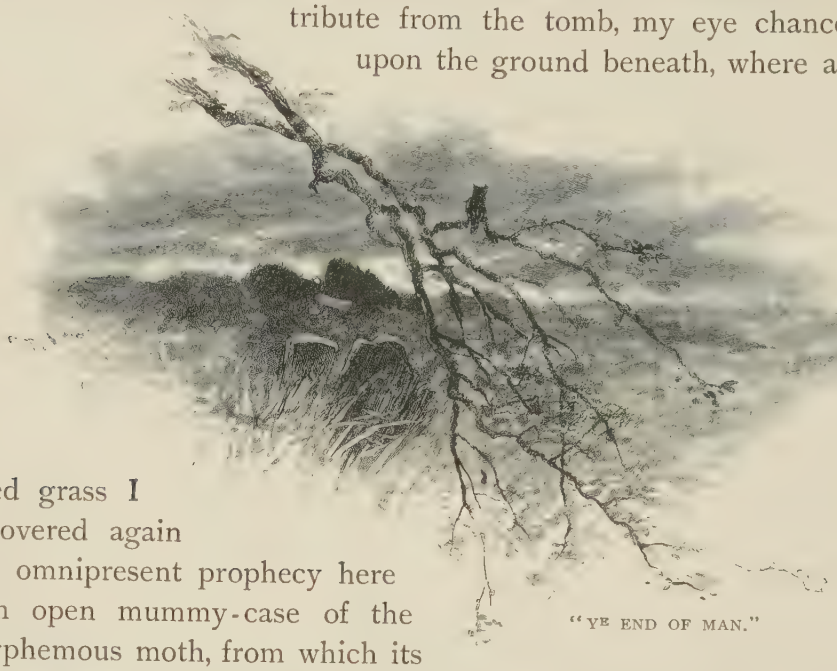
THOV · GVISE · OF · MORTAL · FLESH ·
PAVSE · & · READ.

A Handfull of Dvst lyes buri^{e}d hear
Last vestige of what Earth held de^{ar}
What I am now So yov mvst be.
Then ponder well my words to thee.

o o o o

LAY · HOLD · ON · LIFE · ACQUIRE · WH'T · MORTAL^{S}
CAN. · HEAR · SEE · WITH · DEEP · CONCERN. · Y^{E}
END · OF · MAN.

None but myself can ever know the thrill of that beautiful experience when, with mind wrapt for the moment in the heresy of this grim tribute from the tomb, my eye chanced to fall upon the ground beneath, where among the faded grass I discovered again that omnipresent prophecy here—an open mummy-case of the polyphemous moth, from which its life had flown. Such has been the impress of the insect in my daily saunterings—such, I hope, it always may be; for verily it is my belief, with "the greatest of metaphysical poets," that



"YE END OF MAN."

> "He who feels contempt
> For any living thing hath faculties
> Which he has never used—thought with him
> Is in its infancy."

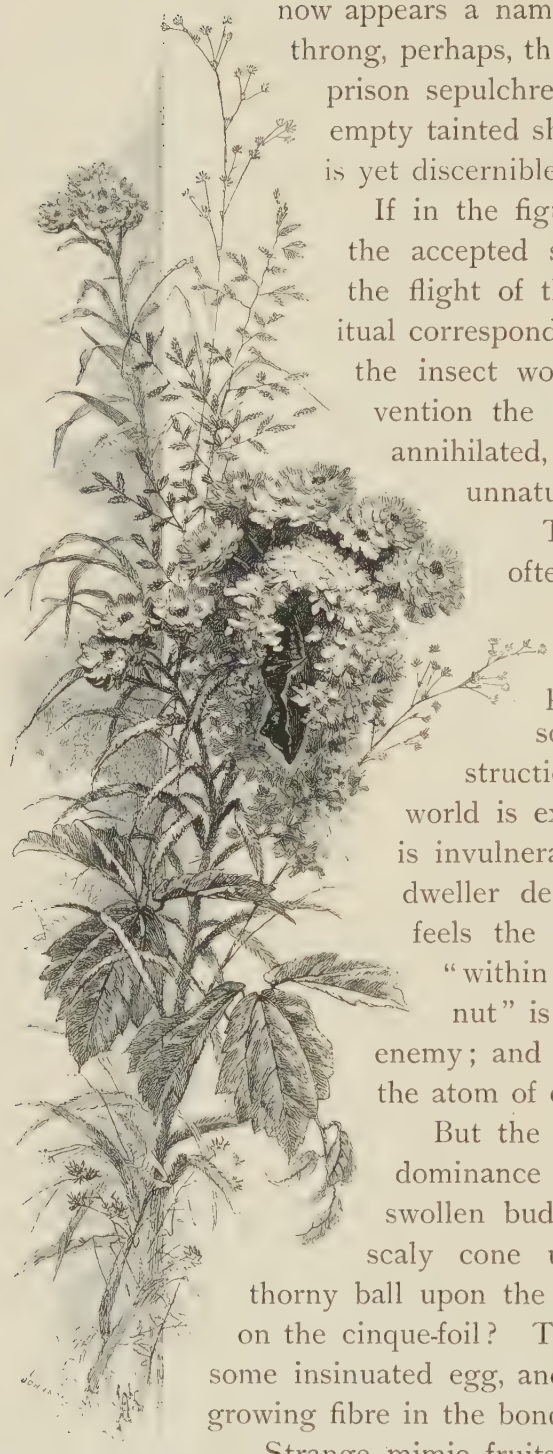
Nearly every one, it would seem, knows a caterpillar well enough to shudder at the sight of it—and often, be it admitted, with some show of reason; but here is a shy recluse among these everlasting-flowers that I would disclose in its hiding-place, that all may look upon it. Rarely is this insect noticed by the casual eye; and naturally enough, for it is a creature of the darkness, and seldom appears to feed among the leaves except at nightfall, secluding itself through the day in a quaint nest made from the petals of the everlasting-flowers woven in the meshes of a silken web, and hung therewith among the blossom-clusters. Many of these nests have doubtless been seen by casual observers and noted only as withered clusters swaying in the wind. Indeed, they seem to have

escaped the keener eyes of entomologists as well, for I find no mention of them in their books. More often these petal-bowers are hidden cosily among the flower-heads; but I have found many specimens, four and five inches in length, hanging pendent beneath. Near the upper side a small opening may be discovered; and if we look within, or tear the nest asunder, we surprise the little hermit in its solitude—perhaps a formidable-appearing creature, beset with spines, ornamented with yellow spots, and banded with belts of yellow and maroon. Such is its more common complexion. But occasionally we disclose its sleeping chrysalis —an exquisite disguise, that well might win the laurel as a product of rare bijoutry. Bright, indeed, is the sleep of this beautiful aurelia, if these testimonies paint its dreams! A pendent form of solid gold, lit from beneath with faint flames of opal; here smouldered and half lost beneath a bloom of ashy silver, or flooded with a tinge of emerald; inlaid here with iridescent pearl, or merged into a molten mosaic of burnished gold. There are strange devices in enamel of golden-green, and all chased and sculptured with ornate art that defies the lens, and to which the microscope is but an eye to infinite realms of exalted splendor.

Such is the rare jewel that hangs among the immortelles.

Thus, one by one, did the weeds and vines, the folded leaves and blossoms, yield their confidences to me. But, alas! as the years stole on, laden with their accumulated store of experience and discovery, there came with them a host of troublous thoughts and testimonies inexplicable. The chrysalis had become my ensign—my unfailing promise of the butterfly—and the butterfly the *imago* of my aspirations. But on a fated day I saw my idol arrested in its flight, pounced upon in mid-air, torn to pieces and devoured before my eyes by its arch-enemy, the sand-hornet. I was suddenly brought to realize, in my boyish fashion, that the glory of the gorgeous wing was, after all, but dust—that this member must soon cease to flutter, and my emblem of the soul "must needs perish and inherit the doom, the oblivion of all flesh."

Neither was this all; for, as the record of discovery increased, perplexities innumerable seemed thrust upon me. My caterpillar still lived his life of luxury; my chrysalis shone resplendent in its gold; but my butterfly, alas! not only did it perish in the dust, but, woe is me! it finally ceased to appear at all. For, look! false promise—the gold upon its fair encasement has faded in corruption, the pearl has disappeared, and where I had learned to watch for the coming resurrection there



TESTIMONY OF THE IMMORTELLES.

now appears a nameless shape—a ghoul—an impish throng, perhaps, that gnaw their way through the prison sepulchre, and leave in their flight but an empty tainted shell—a hollow mockery, whereon is yet discernible the irony of folded wing.

If in the figure of the butterfly we welcome the accepted sign of immortality, personating the flight of the soul, what, then, is the spiritual correspondence of this dread ichneumon of the insect world by whose demoniacal intervention the identity of the perfect being is annihilated, absorbed, and replaced by this unnatural progeny?

The parasite is omnipresent, and often, it would seem, almost omnipotent. It appears in endless disguises; an army that peoples the air we breathe, and that sows broadcast the seeds of destruction. No creature of the insect world is exempt from its attack, no armor is invulnerable, no shelter a pavilion. The dweller deep within the solid tree-trunk feels the destroying thrust; the refugee "within the walled circumference of a nut" is completely at the mercy of his enemy; and even the microscopic embryo in the atom of egg is a common prey.

But the vegetable kingdom knows their dominance as well. Have you seen that swollen bud upon the osier, the abnormal scaly cone upon the cordate willow, that thorny ball upon the brier-rose, or the crimson berry on the cinque-foil? These are but the wily pranks of some insinuated egg, and of its artful elf that holds the growing fibre in the bondage of its whim.

Strange mimic fruits are borne on leaves bewitched, the tiny bud becomes a tessellated tenement, the stem

a bastioned castle. But not invulnerable, for these in turn are invaded by the parasite with weapons from without. New guests are ushered into the tempting domiciles, unbidden patrons that proceed to eat the host at his own table, and then usurp his luxury.

What with its parasites and its high-handed murderers, it would seem that nature were a vast arena (a mirror held up to the world of human life) where the mighty oppress the weak, and that universal massacre and destruction were the key-note of the world's economy. The blue-bird and the lark, beloved of poets, perpetuate their song by carnage. Murder is the secret impetus of the swallow's glancing flight. The happy-hearted vireo carols his overflowing jubilee from the leafy tree-top —an endless offering of grace, each lovely note the tell-tale of a massacre, for blood is in his eye.

Consider for the moment how "these thorns upon the rose of life" pierced the heart of "our Lord Buddha" when,

> "Looking deep, he saw
> How lizard fed on ant, and snake on him,
> And kite on both; and how the fish-hawk robbed
> The fish-tiger of that which it had seized;
> The shrike chasing the bulbul, which did chase
> The jewelled butterflies; till everywhere
> Each slew a slayer, and in turn was slain,
> Life living upon death. So the fair show
> Veiled one vast, savage, grim conspiracy
> Of mutual murder—from the worm to man,
> Who himself kills his fellow."

Who shall solve these dark problems of nature? for it is not alone the hieroglyph of chrysalis or the painted wing, the figure of resurrected moth or the mockery of the blighted sepulchre, that tests our thought, but every living or inanimate thing in some form invites our seeking, even as in the new-born fern it takes an open symbol, and mimics the interrogation point.

There are stupendous questions even in leaves, questions yet unanswered in opening buds, questions that glisten in the air on plumy seeds, riddles in rainbow colors imprisoned in a petal, and an endless catechism hangs on many a fragile stem.

These problems greet us everywhere; and often may we find them, easy lessons for the novice—acrostics, as it were, answered in the asking.

FIELD BOUQUET.

You are sitting, perhaps, beneath the maple on the hill-side. A small dead twig protrudes from the foliage directly at your elbow. How delicate the gray tints upon its bark! See the scarred joints from which the opposite leaves have fallen, and note this tiny tuft of light-green

lichen, and this double bud upon the swollen tip. Perhaps you strive to pick it for a closer look, when, lo! it moves. It is a caterpillar, and you are bound to admit, in simulation such as this, an obvious intention.

Again, a brilliant moth comes hovering swiftly toward you, flashing like a scarlet meteor in its flight. Suddenly it makes a fluttering dive, and alights upon the gray rock at your feet, and is gone. Had the granite bowlder absorbed the insect it could scarce have more effectually disappeared. In vain you search its lichened surface for that brilliant glow, little knowing that your eyes have rested on the object of your search a dozen times, and that your hand is even now almost in contact with that living coal which but smoulders for a moment beneath the ashes of its covering wings.

These are but types of Nature's lavish hints, concessions to the superficial eye. Self-evident truths, and involving no mental tax, we readily accept them. But how rarely do we seek the testimonies that are hidden from our view — indeed, more often only veiled behind a gauzy petal, wrapped within the "cradle of a leaf," or nestled in the chalice of a blossom!

Truly has the rapt follower of our "humblebee" attested

> "There was never mystery but 'twas figured
> In the flowers."

Why should the starry blossom of the fringed mitella seek the snowflake as its model? why the fluttering orchid coquette with the butterfly? why this single violet with a spur? why the sweet-tipped cornucopias of the columbine? What elf took pity on the painted-cup, and decked its leaves with the brilliant scarlet denied its hidden flower? Did he send the tiny winged mignon to seek the creeping cinque-foil, learn the disappointment of its yellow blossom, and with magic needle thread those crimson beads upon the fruitless stems?

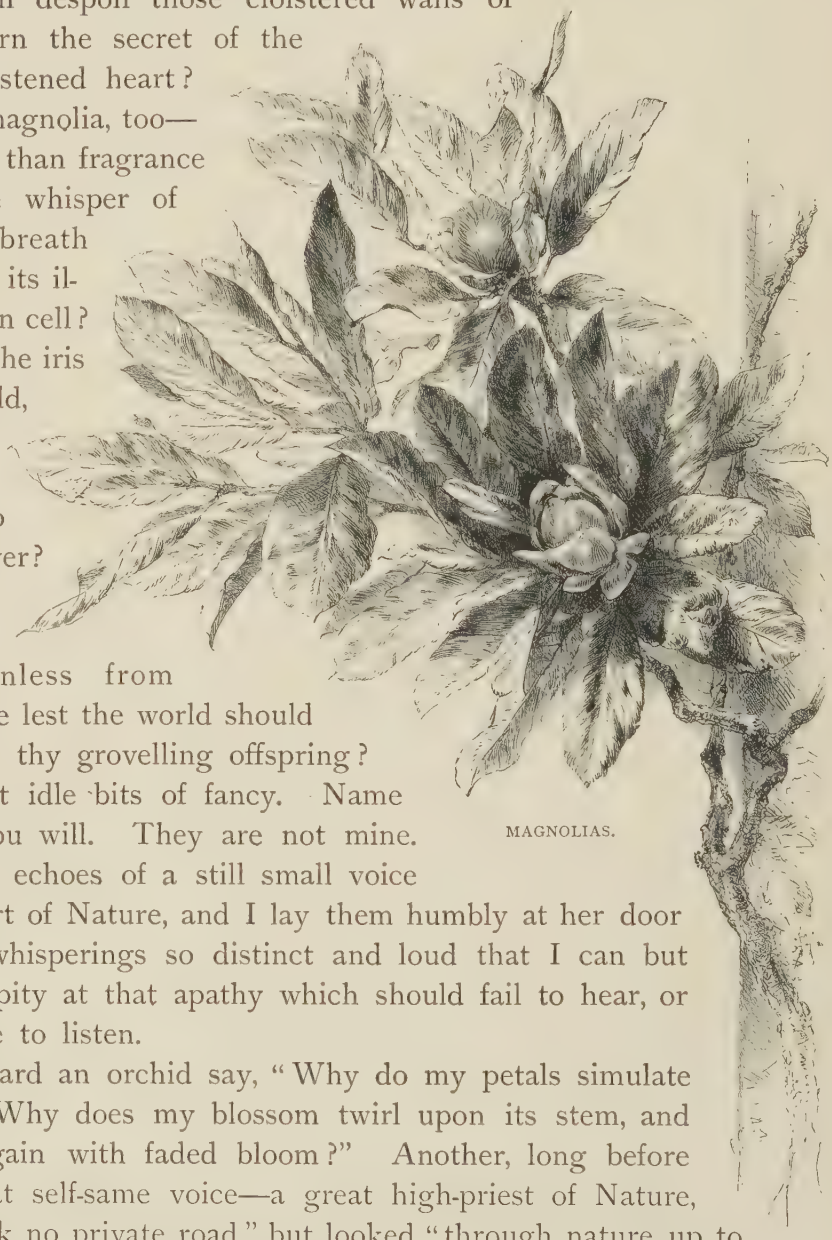
The dandelion spreads its galaxies upon the lawn—a rival firmament. Who shall be the true interpreter of this "El Dorado in the grass," this

> "Dear common flower that grows beside the way,
> Fringing the dusty road with harmless gold?"

Why the quick concealment of its smothered glow? Is it with conscious shame that this bending stem, mantling with crimson blush, withdraws its faded gold, and hides beneath the lowly leaves? or may it be

with patient consciousness of that coming miracle, when, freed from its cumbrous dross, it shall rise again perfected in its beauty, transfigured as a vision to the new-blown faces crowding humbly at its feet?

Who shall despoil those cloistered walls of blue, and learn the secret of the gentian's chastened heart? The veiled magnolia, too—was ever else than fragrance found in the whisper of that sweet breath floating from its illumined prison cell? Why should the iris shield its gold, or the twin-leaved colt's-foot seek to screen its flower? Why indeed, my humble birthwort, unless from wounded pride lest the world should chance to see thy grovelling offspring? Call these but idle bits of fancy. Name them what you will. They are not mine. They are but echoes of a still small voice from the heart of Nature, and I lay them humbly at her door—echoes of whisperings so distinct and loud that I can but wonder with pity at that apathy which should fail to hear, or hearing, pause to listen.



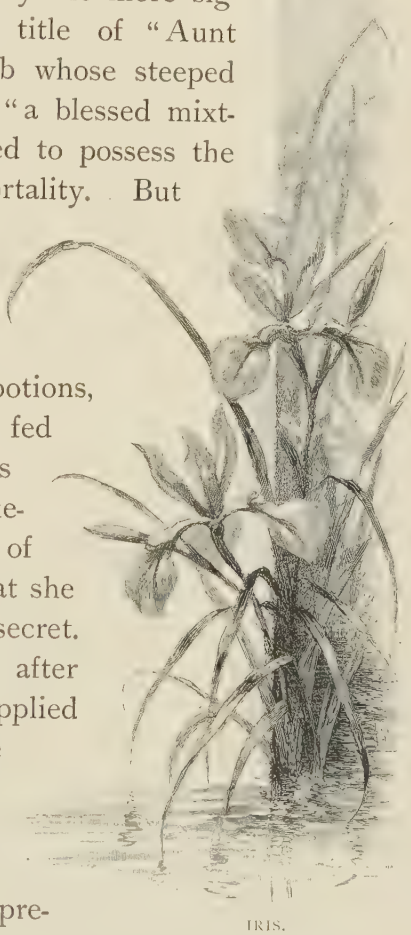
MAGNOLIAS.

Once I heard an orchid say, "Why do my petals simulate the swan? Why does my blossom twirl upon its stem, and yet unfold again with faded bloom?" Another, long before me, heard that self-same voice—a great high-priest of Nature, one who "took no private road," but looked "through nature up to nature's God." He yielded to the invitation of that mysterious flower; he won its confidence, and has since made known, to the wonder of the scientific world, the revelation that had lain screened behind a petal,

awaiting through the ages for its chosen confidant and disciple—a revelation that reads like the mystic chronicle of some realm of wonderland, illumined with that supernal lamp, in truth, "the light which never was on sea or land."

Here among this blossoming tangle another old acquaintance claims our recognition, shedding its spicy fragrance as we press among its foliage; but not for thee, thou seeker after similes, for it tells a worldly tale. This is the aromatic tansy—a name long since supplanted in my mental botany by the more significant if less general title of "Aunt Huldy's favorite," an herb whose steeped infusion, otherwise ycleped "a blessed mixtur," this aged crone believed to possess the talisman of earthly immortality. But Aunt Huldy was a fickle "creetur," and had many favorites among the "yarbs." Sweet-fern and yarrow in their various potions, soups, etc., she literally fed upon; and then there was the boneset, and the snakeroot, her chief godsend, of whose mysterious habitat she alone possessed the secret. This latter plant, season after season, it is believed, supplied the coffers of this village simpler to the tune of a whole year's necessities. Every handful of this herb meant to her a precious equivalent of coin at the village store, for the Virginia snakeroot was, and is to this day, a trusty stand-by in most New England villages.

ORCHID.



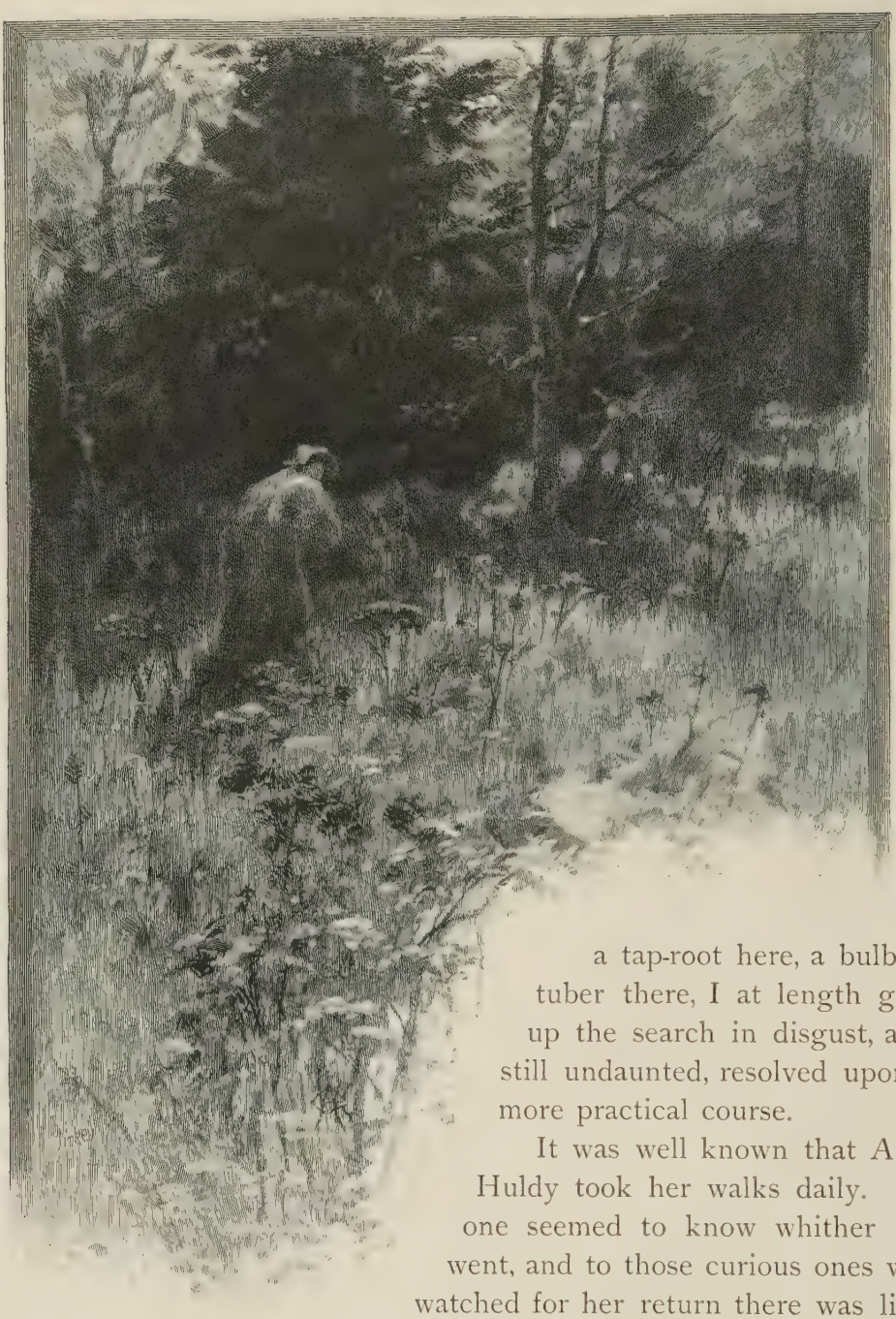
IRIS.

He is no New-Englander, certainly, who has never heard of "snake-root tea;" but who is he that has ever seen aught of the vegetable but the black and wiry roots? There are, probably, few of our native plants represented in the *materia medica*, and so commonly in use, that are as little known in their natural state of growth, and, judging from the revelations of my own native town, the explanation is not a difficult one. At best this plant is far from common in New England. It is notably fastidious in its selection of habitat, and those possessed of the knowledge of this hunting-ground are seldom prone to ventilate their botany. Indeed, the village botany class is usually narrowed down to one—the simpler. Did the snakeroot but chance to reverse the order of nature, and grow with its roots above-ground, we might take the visible hint of the fibrous threads in our bowl of "tea" and give intelligent search, even though it had a showy flower—a label, as it were—to fix in our memory, by which we might "spot" it among the herbage. But the snakeroot is a modest benefactor and model of charity—does not placard its wares nor parade its virtues.

Like its cousin the wild ginger, the blossoms of this herb are insignificant affairs, small, bashful things that hang their heads and hug close to the ground at the skirts of the parent stem. As a flower it is almost a curiosity, and is rarely seen except by herbalists or students of botany; and its leaf—well, in those days I never could discover that it *had* such a thing as a leaf. How often did I seek for some such glimpse among my newly-purchased package!—something tangible, a hint that should guide me in my daily search in wood and field; for I knew full well that of all the native drugs at the village store the snakeroot was the chief desideratum, and I also knew that the prescription trade in this commodity was entirely supplied by the vigilant Aunt Huldy. Day after day her familiar stooping figure, with scarlet hood, might be seen at the medicine counter as, with knowing wink, she unfolded her apron and disclosed those bunches of fibrous roots. And more than once an eager small boy, I remember, pressed close upon her elbow in hopes of a glimpse of something green among that tangle: *roots*, but never a suggestion of stem, leaf, or flower. These tell-tale signs, you may be sure, were carefully eliminated, even to the last shred. And when I observed that daily stipend passed over the counter to the miserly old dame, and saw the precious lucre rolled carefully in the old red handkerchief, and stowed away next her heart, as she mumbled her incantation, witchery,

THE SIMPLER'S FAVORITE.

or what not, I became suddenly convinced that this sort of thing was an imposition. "Anti-monopoly" became my cry, and I organized myself a party of one to put down this great injustice. I determined to unlock the mystery. But this was impossible without a key. Could I but get a leaf! Then a happy thought struck me, and I sought assistance from my botany — almost my first impetus to turn its leaves; and while I am conscious that in this early essay those pages seemed little less than Greek to me, I remember feeling as I read that, with its petioled, hastate-cordate leaf, and apetalous flower, with gynandrous stamens, sessile, adnate, extrorse anthers, and trilobate, truncate stigma, etc., the Virginia snakeroot ought to make considerable of a sensation in its neighborhood, and I sallied forth with renewed confidence of success. I sought out several suspicious-looking plants that seemed to look rather extrorse, or gynandrous, or otherwise formidable; but it availed me little; and after making sad havoc among the weeds on right and left, tugging at stalks of bugloss, spikenard, ginseng, and a long companion list, turning up



THE MYSTERIOUS ERRAND.

a tap-root here, a bulb or tuber there, I at length gave up the search in disgust, and, still undaunted, resolved upon a more practical course.

It was well known that Aunt Huldy took her walks daily. No one seemed to know whither she went, and to those curious ones who watched for her return there was little satisfaction, for she always came home empty-handed, or at best with a sprig of yarrow, tansy, or equally common herb, while on the following morning, bright and early, she would appear at the village store and empty

an apronful of these aromatic roots upon the counter, duly receiving the usual payment therefor.

This gave rise to the general belief that the snakeroot was one of her garden crops. But I knew differently. It was a crop that was gathered somewhere among the mountain woods. Just where, she only knew, and there was but one way of finding out her secret, and this way I had resolved to take at the first opportunity. And here fortune favored me; for while walking home in the dark, returning from a swim at "the willows" with the village boys, taking a short-cut through a lonely wood, I was startled by an ominous crackling of twigs some yards ahead. I stopped and listened; it became more and more distinct, until at length a shadowy form emerged from the bushes, and crossed my path only a few feet in advance of where I stood. It was the figure

DUSK.

of a woman bent with age, and in the light of a favoring moon-ray I discerned the scarlet hood. It was Aunt Huldy, and her face was set toward the mountain path. Here was my golden opportunity, and I embraced it. She led me a long chase, and more than once I trembled in my shoes as I crouched behind some tree or dropped among the weeds, observing her stop, motionless as a statue, while she listened, with the opening of her hood turned directly toward me. Her low, mumbling voice was an incessant accompaniment, and every now and then I could almost catch a word or two in higher cadence among the weird monotone. At length she led me across a scrubby pasture lot, from this into a dark, wet wood road, and out again into an open clearing. Here she paused, seated herself upon a stump, and I watched for developments. But she was immovable, and apparently had only stopped to rest and reconnoitre. Satisfied that all was well, she resumed her walk, varying

AUNT HULDY.

her mumbling monotone by a quiet, grating laugh that seemed less like a human utterance than the distant laughter of a loon hoarse with age.

Thus I dogged her footsteps for nearly a mile, when she suddenly seemed to slacken her pace. She had approached the edge of a wood bordered with dark hemlocks, beyond which the moon shone at its full. The jutting tips of the evergreen foliage were sharply cut in the moonlight, but all below was lost in a deep dark shadow thrown far out upon the chaparral. Into this shadow my mysterious guide disappeared, and more than once I thought I had lost her in its glamour, until at last my curiosity met its reward, as I saw her emerge into a moon-ray and pause before a large flat stone, where she stood and listened as before, looking toward me out of the eloquent shadow of that hood. Then she stooped, grasped the edge of the stone, and, with a wild, unearthly croak, rolled it from its place. In a moment

more she was down upon her knees before it, and I could plainly detect the eager motion of her busy hands. Now she is up again; she replaces the stone, hobbles to a clump of weeds and plucks a handful, and turning again upon her path, begins her homeward journey.

I can readily recall my breathless suspense as she hurried by and almost brushed against me in my retreat beneath the elders, and I remember well the startling, pallid face, with its sharp-cut shadows of the moonlight. There was something intensely weird and uncanny in this aged figure prowling by herself on this lonely mountain-slope, and those mumbling, broken utterances here seemed more than ever like the mystic incantations of the sorceress which nearly every one supposed them, until upon this eventful night I caught their import from the grin of those withered lips. How quickly did that mysterious spell vanish beneath the revelation!

"Find 'em, kin they? Well, let 'em try on't. Ha! ha! ha!"—the closing refrain being prolonged into a loon-like laugh in a high, broken voice that found me listening for an answering challenge from the sleeping lake that lay silvered by the moon in the valley below. "Aunt Huldy knows whar to git 'em," I heard her say as she swept by.

Ah, my deluded dame, be not too loud in thy exultation, for shadows have ears, and this night thy monopoly shall end! There are sermons in stones, neither does the cunning artifice of those loose-lying sprigs of tansy and yarrow half conceal the rounded weight in the apron below.

I sometimes wonder how I could have withstood the temptation of jumping out upon Aunt Huldy and frightening her half to death with a wild war-whoop, but when I consider further I am conscious of that overawing suspicion as to the exact status of this old crone. I remember she shed an atmosphere of chill from her garments on that night, and I dare say I entertained a sense of dread lest, by the pointing of her skinny finger and an accompanying hiss, she should change me to a toad or lizard on the spot.

But soon she was lost to eye and ear. I crawled from my concealment, and sought that stone with an eagerness almost akin to her own, and the evidences which I found beneath told conclusively the story of this shrewd scheme of duplicity and profit, for here lay the withered stalks and leaves of the precious herb, safely concealed, and a single tell-tale cluster of the spicy roots, which in some unaccountable way had escaped her clutches.

Of course the spot was visited on the following morning by an exultant small boy with a big basket. But perhaps it is unnecessary to add that its returning weight never proved a burden. For, even with his "key" in hand, no opportunity offered for its use. No single plant had escaped the grasp of those gleaning fingers or the fate of that flat rock. Small boy, thou couldst have done better on that morning, for even then, not half a mile away, another stone was "loading up" for a nightly pilgrimage!

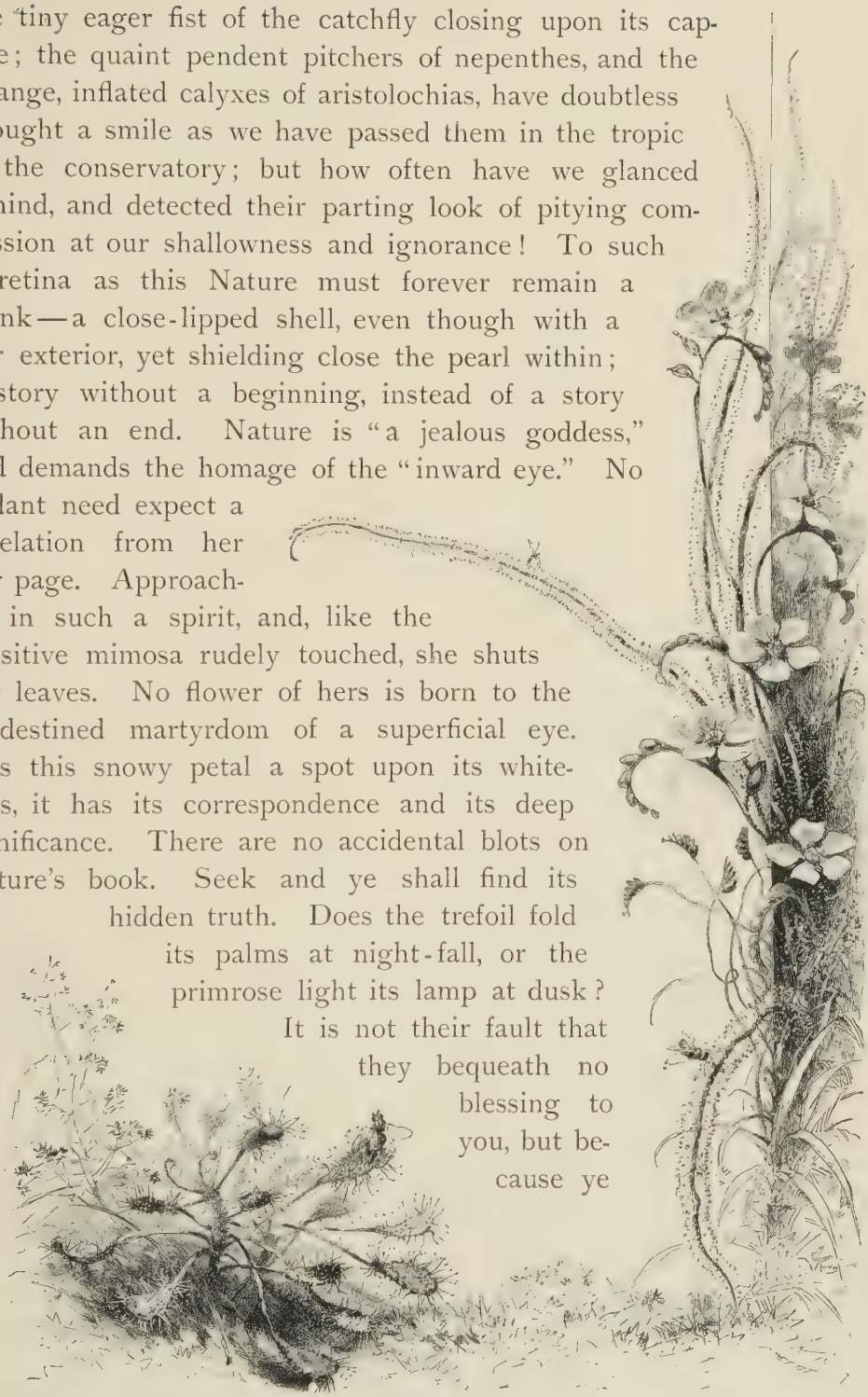
Here comes to mind among my "waving lines" a twinkling nest of diamonds among the bogs, bathed in flashing aureoles of emerald and ruby, birthplace of a million sunbeams. Who has seen the scintillating sun-dew hung full with beads of crystal? Let such bestow their charity upon him who should think to call its faintest semblance from his pencil-tip.

See this dazzled fly, that with hovering buzz alights upon those tempting drops. Why this eager, clinging touch of the hungry filaments that hold their struggling prisoner dying in their grasp? Who cast this cruel spell upon our delicate drosera that impels this life of carnage, and yet bedews its fringes with incessant weeping?

Near by, perchance—a fit companion—the bacchanal sarracenia lifts its fated cup. Strange tyrant! How livid the downcast face of that hideous flower, that stalks among its lairs, and seems to gloat upon the victims of its poisoned cups! Here is a pit whose depths are yet unfathomed, a fated leaf whose deadly secret has been sought in vain, a charnel-house from which no voice has yet been heard, and yet how readily do we "tread on it with our clouted shoon," and dismiss it with a mere smile of humor and curiosity, that ready refuge of the superficial mind! To such the rose is cherished for its sensuous loveliness. In its fragrance and its beauty there is reason for its being. To such the noisome hermit of the marsh, the swamp-cabbage flower, but blooms for the gaze of toads and frogs and creatures of the boggy ooze, fit companion for the lizard and the dwellers of the mud. Uncouth children, such as these are called, conceived by Mother Nature in her trespasses of revelry, outbursts of her latent playfulness and waywardness, eccentricities for the idle amusement of humanity, or, in fine—why not?—manifestations of a certain sort of divine humor!

Who has not seen this lowly tenant of the bogs, and wondered at its worthless life? Many of us, no doubt, have had our little laugh at

the tiny eager fist of the catchfly closing upon its captive; the quaint pendent pitchers of nepenthes, and the strange, inflated calyxes of aristolochias, have doubtless brought a smile as we have passed them in the tropic of the conservatory; but how often have we glanced behind, and detected their parting look of pitying compassion at our shallowness and ignorance! To such a retina as this Nature must forever remain a blank — a close-lipped shell, even though with a fair exterior, yet shielding close the pearl within; a story without a beginning, instead of a story without an end. Nature is "a jealous goddess," and demands the homage of the "inward eye." No pedant need expect a revelation from her fair page. Approached in such a spirit, and, like the sensitive mimosa rudely touched, she shuts her leaves. No flower of hers is born to the predestined martyrdom of a superficial eye. Has this snowy petal a spot upon its whiteness, it has its correspondence and its deep significance. There are no accidental blots on Nature's book. Seek and ye shall find its hidden truth. Does the trefoil fold its palms at night-fall, or the primrose light its lamp at dusk? It is not their fault that they bequeath no blessing to you, but because ye



SUN-DEWS.

are blind. "Eyes have ye, but they see not." They are unblest of that deeper inspiration which seeks Nature with the bowed head and bended knee of Wordsworth when he avows,

> "To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

For there are eyes and eyes—eyes that merely look, and others "made for seeing"—"windows of the soul." Else the world of nature had never known the heritage of such names as Darwin, Huxley, Agassiz, Huber, Swammerdam, Sprengel, Linnæus, White of Selborne, and the rest of their great fraternity. The vital mission of our "humblebee," the lessons of the ant, the wonders of the orchid, and the deeper, more mysterious errand of that

> "Painted populace
> That live in fields and lead ambrosial lives,"

had yet remained in obscurity; the humble earthworm and its special mission still lain buried beneath our feet, sole mask for the luring fish-hook, the testy prey of robin on the lawn, or quarry of dark-dwelling mole beneath the sod; and we above as darkened and as blind as they.

Philosophical astronomy may picture to horrified humanity the resultant chaos and annihilation of a sun extinguished, or indeed of the merest deviation in the orbit of a single planet, but who could foretell the direful consequences that might follow from the extermination even of a single species of these tiny "meadow tribes"—yea, even the mosquito, forsooth!—when, most humble of them all, the lowly earthworm rises to such lofty proportions of importance in the world's economy?

Thanks for this last token of a life of meek devotion, a humility that could stoop to learn even at the burrow of the earthworm, and which should find a period of thirty years too short a time in which to plead the cause of this most despised and lowliest of animated creatures. The lawn and meadow, the mountain and the mighty river, take on a new significance and a new religion beneath the lessons of this last volume of the lamented Mr. Darwin.

"When we behold," he remarks in conclusion, "a wide turf-covered expanse, we should remember that its smoothness, on which so much of its beauty depends, is mainly due to all the inequalities having been slowly levelled by worms. It is a marvellous reflection that the whole

of the superficial mould over any such expanse has passed, and will again pass every few years, through the bodies of worms. The plough is one of the most ancient and most valuable of man's inventions, but long before he existed the land was in fact regularly ploughed, and still continues to be thus ploughed, by earthworms. It may be doubted whether there are many other animals which have played so important a part in the history of the world as have these lowly-organized creatures."

That charming naturalist, White of Selborne, from whom Mr. Darwin received his earliest inspiration in this field of study, has declared, as a result of his own investigations, that "without worms the earth would soon become cold, hard-bound, and void of fermentation, and consequently sterile."

They are Nature's own gardeners and tillers of the soil. They people the sod, and feed the roots of plants with fertilizing elements of *débris*, which they draw into their burrows or bury beneath the rich humus of their castings. In many parts of England, we are told, new subsoil to the weight of over *ten tons* per acre is thus brought to the surface each successive year. Nor is this all. Washed by rains, this vast accumulation of mould is swept from the sloping hill-sides, denuding the surface, and at length even affecting the contour not only of hills but mountains; thus it is poured into the streams, thence into great rivers, which, finally, may be turned from their natural channels by this gradual deposit, and the consequent raising of their beds to the level of the adjacent land. Again, in the form of dust this mould is blown by the wind; and many instances are known where ancient buildings, and even ruined cities, have thus been buried beneath the castings of the earth-worm.

Under the ministry of such books as these one may well look upon his path with solicitude of his footprints, and reproach the memory of those rampant, boyish days when nature seemed a vast menagerie sent for him to tame, when every bird was but a living target, "nameless without a gun," every insect a gewgaw for a pin, and every flower "a thing beneath his shoon," or a gaud to pluck and throw away. Perchance he may recall that emblematic picture of a tiny apron filled with wilting blossoms of the meadow, of the dimpled fists that scarce could hold the overflow, and of the idle tears that fell because whole fields of beckoning bloom must still be left behind — fields wherein we shall

walk in after-life, longing vainly for wings, if only to lift us from the carnage of a crushing foot—where

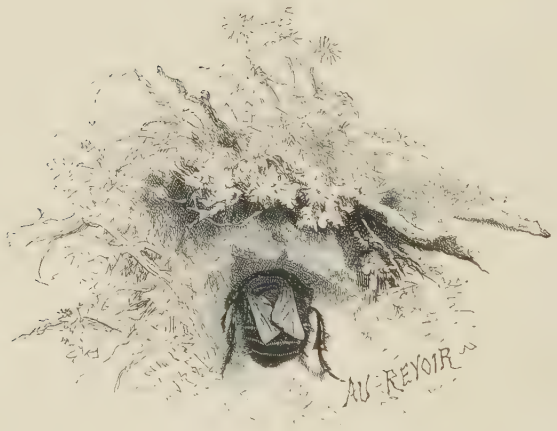
"In the grass sweet voices talk;"

where every clod

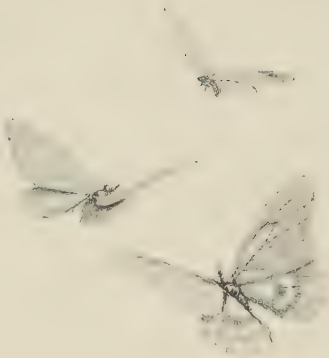
"Springs to a soul in grass and flowers;"

and where one feels the impress of a sentiment sublime, which might almost take the voice of Buddha:

"Kill not, in Pity's sake, and lest ye slay
The meanest thing upon its upward way."



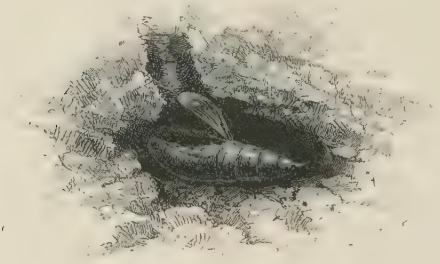
Among Our Footprints.

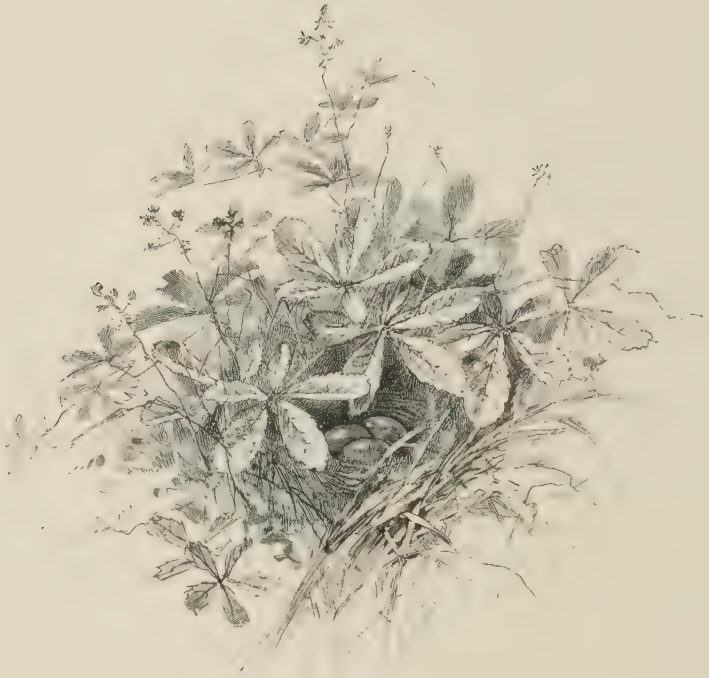


"He had felt the power
Of Nature, and already was prepared,
By his intense conceptions, to receive
Deeply, the lesson deep of love which he
Whom Nature, by whatever means, has taught
To feel intensely cannot but receive.

* * * * * *

Oh, then how beautiful, how bright, appear'd
The written Promise! He had early learn'd
To reverence the Volume which displays
The mystery—the life which cannot die.
But in the mountains did he feel his faith:
There did he see the writing, all things there
Breathed immortality, revolving life,
And greatness still revolving, infinite;
There littleness was not; the least of things
Seemed infinite; and there his spirit shaped
Her prospects, nor did he believe—he *saw*.
What wonder if his being thus became
Sublime and comprehensive? Low desires,
Low thoughts had there no place: yet was his heart
Lowly; for he was meek in gratitude
Oft as he called those ecstasies to mind,
And whence they flowed, and from them he acquir'd
Wisdom, which works through patience: thence he learn'd
In many a calmer hour of sober thought
To look on Nature with a humble heart,
Self-question'd where it did not understand,
And with a superstitious eye of love."





TO one naturally possessed of a keen and searching vision, perpetually educated by that continual practice inspired by a love of nature-study, the judgment of Thoreau upon the "walkers" of his period, or at least of

his acquaintance, wins an emphasized significance, if not an added sentiment of hearty endorsement: "I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of walking—that is, of taking walks." It is, moreover, by no means a distinction without a difference that prompts the final modifying phrase; for, as a matter of fact, if the truth were known, I believe it would be found that the best "walkers" were, as a rule, the least accomplished in the art of "taking walks."

The "art of walking" smacks of the wager and the sawdust course. It is the pedestrian's art—physical, headlong, and, from our present standpoint, wholly imbecile and unprofitable. Getting over the ground is its sole ambition; and while it were well enough in its proper place, it is, unhappily, not confined to the sawdust track. Its spirit has become a contagion. We see it running riot every summer in our country pilgrimages. It climbs the mountain for the simple glory of the feat. It spins out the miles into the tens and twenties with pride of physical endurance, ploughing its way through Nature's fields and meadows with no higher purpose than is involved in the simple question of time and speed—seemingly to pass by unheeded or tread underfoot the greatest number of Nature's treasures in the shortest space of time.

The estimate of Thoreau was certainly rather discouraging; and while I am convinced that, had "the course of his life" been happily extended to the present day, he would have found a much more hopeful prospect, it is nevertheless true that there is still a "plentiful lack" of that deep and sincere appreciation of Nature which is the great secret and the chief source of pleasure and profit in the "art of taking walks."

Not but that there are, at the present day, a large number of people who love Nature, and are imbued with a certain enthusiasm in her presence; but how often is this enthusiasm identical with that of a child—of an infant, if you will—over some gayly-colored toy?

It is, for instance, but a negative sort of rapture at best which is only to be awakened from its lethargy by the glare of a gaudy leaf or the sun-glitter of a glistening wing, as by the bauble or the trinket. The eye is not only abnormal that should ignore such glaring instances; such a retina is not merely unsympathetic and unresponsive: it is blind. Who is he that could disregard a brilliant, flaming copse of sumac? and who would not experience a sense of pleasure at having seen it? The fiery spike of cardinal-flower gleaming before us in the field kindles a

sympathetic flame in the dullest vision. Our eyes are riveted upon it, not from any impulse of will or choice of their own, but because that glaring torch has signalled them from afar; while at the same time, perhaps, our hands begin to tingle with the sting of some revengeful nettle, seeking recognition through another sense, too often the most keen.

These hints abound in Nature. They are her forcible appeals to the apathy of every dormant sense. To many this nettle would be without a name were it not thus to inoculate itself in the memory; and yet, even in spite of its impetuous method, you will sometimes meet an individual who has been stung a dozen times with a nettle, and is even yet unable to know the rascal when he sees it. He will pick those forked "beggar's ticks" from his clothing time after time, and still fail to recognize the original "beggar" in his native haunts. It would almost seem as though some folks carry their eyes in their pocket whenever brought face to face with Nature.

I remember a certain short conversation, in which I took part, last summer. It was *short* of necessity, and cool—perhaps owing to what I might call a lack of *fuel*. My respondent was a dapper young man, who had but just returned, aglow and exultant, from a mountain-climb at Conway. He had "done it in two hours;" and he was, consequently, the "lion" of the occasion, on free exhibition to an admiring circle of hotel guests and friends. Anticipating the pleasure of the same trip myself, it was but natural to question him concerning its features of the picturesque.

"Is there a fine view on the farther side of the mountain?" I asked.

"Oh yes."

"What are its particular features?"

"Well, I don't remember just what — er — er — mountains, and so forth."

"What sort of a path?" queried I further, getting down to hard-pan.

"Oh, nice and shady nearly all the way."

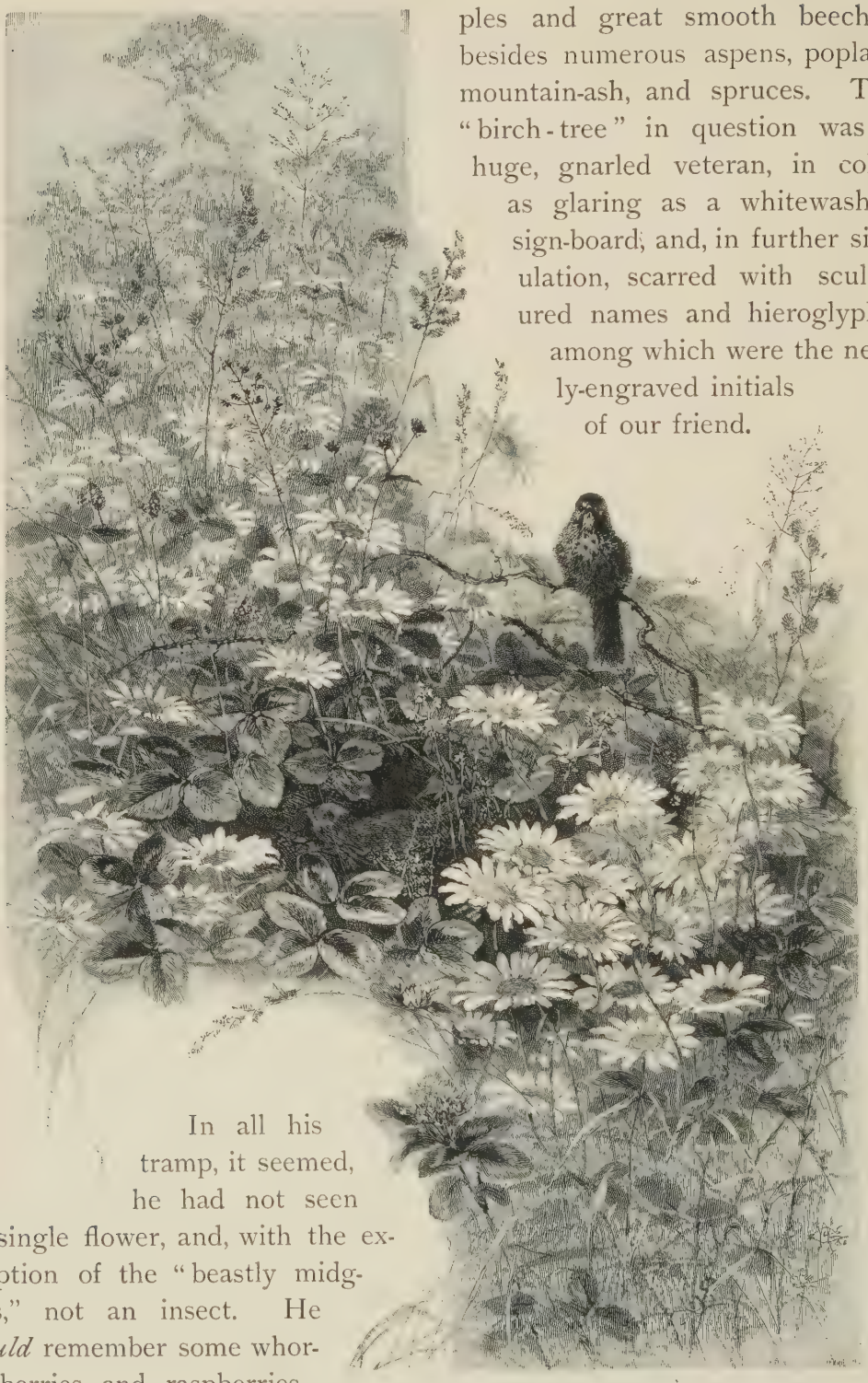
"Mostly hard-wood trees, I presume?"

"Yes—er—er—principally white birch, and—er—some spruce."

After each reply he would come to a dead pause, and gaze fondly at his pedometer.

In point of fact, as I afterward discovered, the "white birch" growth consisted of a single tree near the summit, almost the only solitary birch in sight of the path, which was embowered for a mile with beautiful ma-

ples and great smooth beeches, besides numerous aspens, poplars, mountain-ash, and spruces. The "birch-tree" in question was a huge, gnarled veteran, in color as glaring as a whitewashed sign-board, and, in further simulation, scarred with sculptured names and hieroglyphs, among which were the newly-engraved initials of our friend.



THE SONG-SPARROW'S NEST.

In all his tramp, it seemed, he had not seen a single flower, and, with the exception of the "beastly midgets," not an insect. He *could* remember some whortleberries and raspberries,

while the only bird he was enabled to recall was "a bright scarlet fellow"—a tanager, of course—bright and fiery enough to have burnt a hole in the memory of an imbecile. The whortleberries and raspberries had appealed to another sense, more highly cultivated and susceptible; and it was, doubtless, the same tireless craving of those precious jaws that led to his discovery of a "spruce-tree," by the lump of chewing-gum upon its baited trunk.

The cause of that faint purple tinge upon the mountain-slope—a glow easily discernible even as we conversed on the piazza, tinting the chaparral far up the rugged ridge—this he had failed to discover, although I happened to know that his path had led him directly through its midst, with its dense growth of flowering fire-weed. He could not even now explain that bluish bloom, spreading like a faint reflection of the sky upon the plateau of yonder mountain-spur, although it was there that he stooped, amid a sea of bright blue-berries, and clutched a heavy-laden bush, with which he hurried on to save his precious moments, and munch in secret satisfaction at his economy of time.

He was but a type of a large class of "walkers." How much he missed he will never know, nor care to know. On the day following, however, I followed his footprints. I had started as one of a party of four adventurers on the same tramping-ground; and I was not greatly surprised at an early discovery of the reigning ambition of my three companions to "beat the record" of their predecessor. I dismissed them with pity, and, it must be confessed, with a sense of impatience only half-suppressed; and, seating myself in the meadow—one of the beautiful meadows of the North Conway intervale, through which lay our path—I watched their wanton progress, as they crushed and trampled through the tangles of the fields, until I lost them among the distant trees.

It was a fine morning. The meadow-grasses were yet glistening with their beads of morning dew, and the rowen clover clusters still held up carefully to view in their half-closed palms their wealth of precious gems gathered in the shadows of the night; while, extending from my very feet, far, far away above the herbage, the spangled meadows glittered with silken gossamers—

> "Those wiry webs of silvery dew that twinkle in the morning air"—

flashing with their radiance of sun gems, and spreading in the distance like a glistening silver sea.

The spider is a common object of aversion, but who could henceforth entertain a feeling of repugnance for the humble spinner that can weave so exquisite a fabric as this, which Nature so showers with her jewels? And as we espy him, within the opening of his silken tunnel, waiting and watching for a living morsel for that morning appetite, who could but wonder at the prospect as it appears to those eight watchful eyes as they look out across this bed of diamonds, with now and then its dazzling rainbow flashes gleaming from the kisses of a bevy of drops shaken from their setting on the web, perhaps by the commotion of some "high-elbowed grig" kicking the clover leaves or alighting aloft upon the swaying tip of timothy-grass?

And now a bee settles above upon the clover blossom — a crystal bead is tumbled from its nestling-place, and falls flashing on the sloping canopy. Another and another are overtaken in its course, glancing down the quivering web in a tiny avalanche of sunbeams, each sending forth its parting rainbow gleam as it penetrates the meshes and vanishes among the yielding leaves beneath.

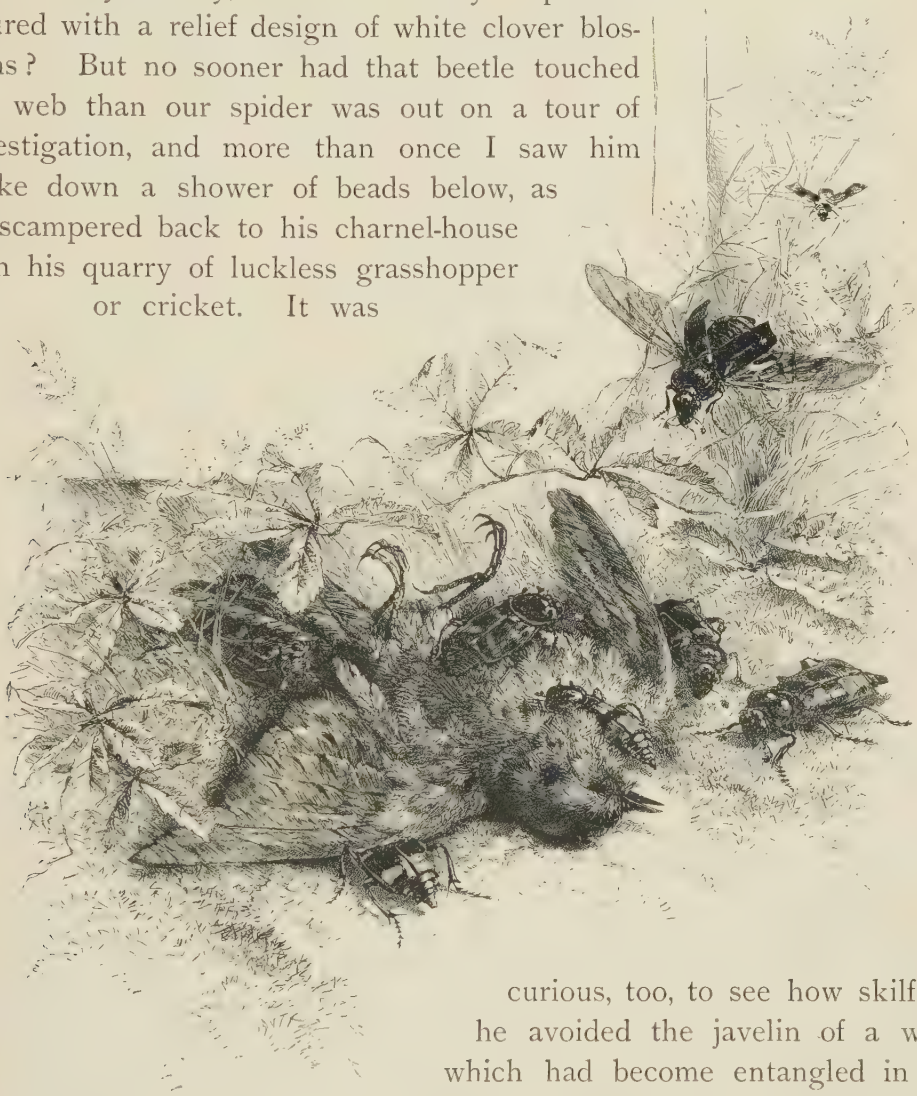
It is a privilege to get down upon one's elbows and study the play of light among this spread of jewels. Now a faint filmy aureola glows in an iridescent halo about some palpitating drop. See how it winks and plays with the twinkling sunbeam, now tinting the air with a melting gleam like the hovering spirit of an emerald, ere long chased away by a radiant ruby flame, and now an instant of glitter, a spangle of light, and its place knows it no more.

It is a privilege, indeed, to search such a footprint as this, and let the eye wander among the infinities of the grassy shadows among which it nestles. Yes, it is damp, and you may "catch your death of cold," but such were a worthy martyrdom. The colds thus caught are only too few.

I confess to a presumptuous rashness in attempting a reproduction of this dewy gossamer, but it is given hopefully, merely as an alluring hint. It is the result of a page or two of notes and sketches made during that morning walk, faithful even to that little fly that lit so tantalizingly near, rubbing and twisting its toes, brushing down its wings, and almost pulling off its head, in its fussy morning toilet.

It was interesting, too, to watch the alert figure just within that silken tunnel, with each separate foot on the *qui vive* for some tell-tale tension on those webs. And what is that subtle power of distinction

by which those feet could detect the difference between the jostle of a falling drop and the touch of a beetle of equivalent weight, even though the latter were out of sight, upon some wing of the "pretty parlor"—a corner, by-the-way, where the dainty carpet was figured with a relief design of white clover blossoms? But no sooner had that beetle touched the web than our spider was out on a tour of investigation, and more than once I saw him shake down a shower of beads below, as he scampered back to his charnel-house with his quarry of luckless grasshopper or cricket. It was



A BURIAL.

curious, too, to see how skilfully he avoided the javelin of a wasp which had become entangled in his lair—partly, be it admitted, through my connivance; and the care with which he confined his attentions well toward the harmless end of his victim was truly laughable: now throwing over his unlucky head an entangling cataract of floss silk, or now and then taking him unawares by a quick assault and an ugly nip in the neighborhood of that slender waist.

The sequence of this tragedy I did not wait to see, for a large beetle

came humming along over the grass, and almost tipped my ear with his buzzing wings, and finally alighted near a clump of yarrow close by.

How often do we hear the query, "What becomes of all the dead birds?" The secret of their mysterious disappearance was half told by the buzz of those brown wings, and the other half is welcome to any one who will take the trouble to follow their lead. This beetle is one of man's incalculable benefactors. It is his mission to aid in keeping fresh and pure the air we breathe. He is the sexton that takes beneath the mould not only the fallen sparrow, but the mice, the squirrels, and even much larger creatures, that die in our woods and fields.

Beneath that clump of yarrow I found just what I had expected—a small dead bird—and the grave-diggers were in the midst of their work. Already the rampart of fresh earth was raised around the body, and the cavity was growing deeper with every moment, as the busy diggers excavated the turf beneath.

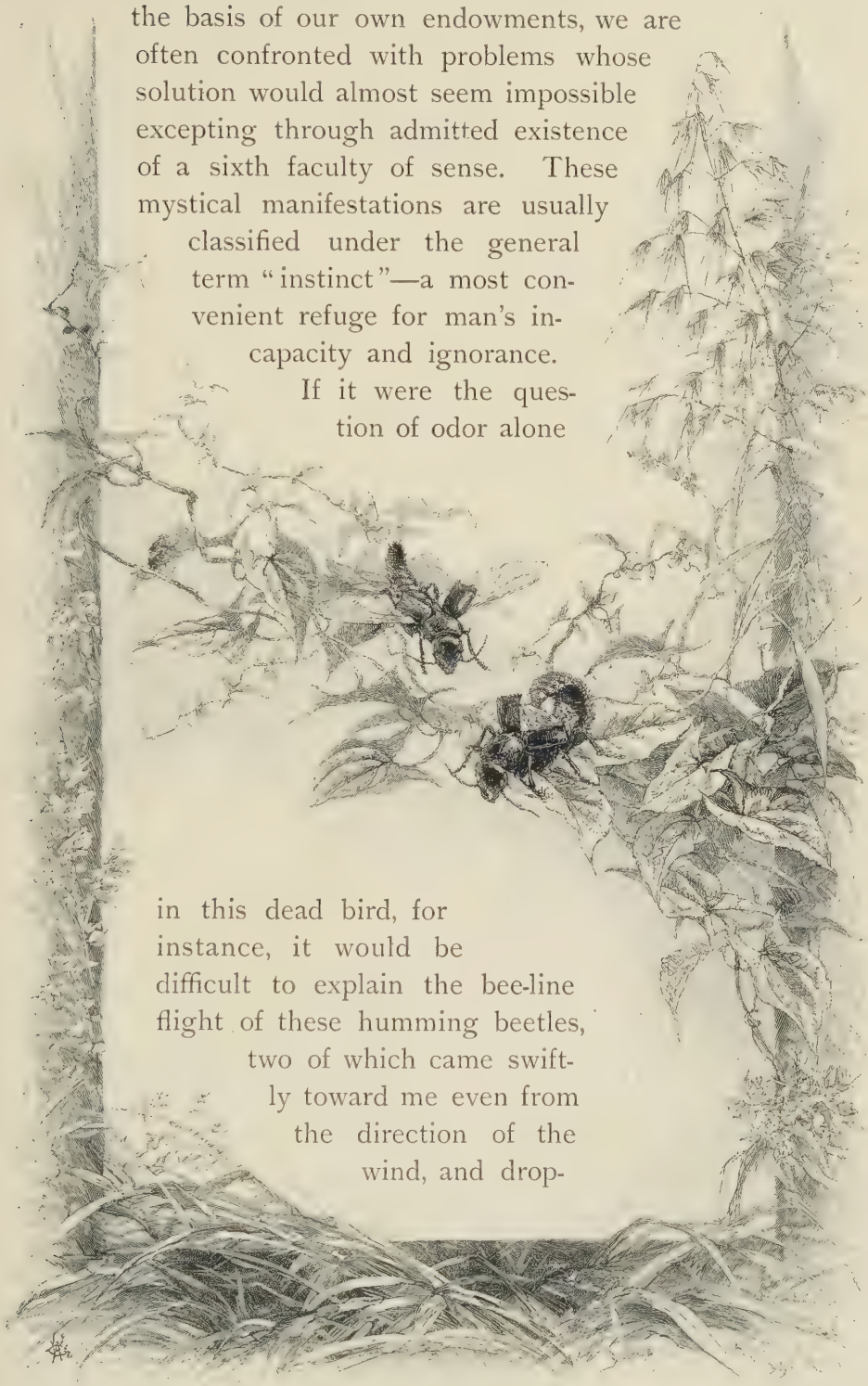
Now and then one would emerge on a tour of inspection, even rummaging among the feathers of that silent throat, and climbing upon the plumy breast to press down the little body into the deepening grave.

These-nature burials are by no means rare, and where the listless eye fails to discover them the nostril will often indicate the way, and to any one desirous of witnessing the operation, without the trouble of search, it is only necessary to place in a convenient spot of loose earth the carcass of some small animal. The most casual observer could hardly fail to be attracted by the orange-spotted beetles which soon will be seen to hover about it. Entomologists assert that these insects are attracted by the odor of decay; but from my own humble investigations I have never been able to fully reconcile myself to this theory.

Whatever the disputed nature of odors—whether an influence exerted by organic atoms carried in the air, or through some system of mysterious vibration, I believe is a problem yet unsolved; but whatever its subtle character, it is entirely under the control of the wind, and is not known to travel against the breeze. Yet I have repeatedly seen these beetles approach directly from the windward, and drop upon their prey as though it were an irresistible magnet hidden in the herbage.

The specific conception of a sixth sense is beyond the full grasp of the human mind. What it should be, to what purpose employed, is a theme for wide speculation; but certain it is that, arguing solely from

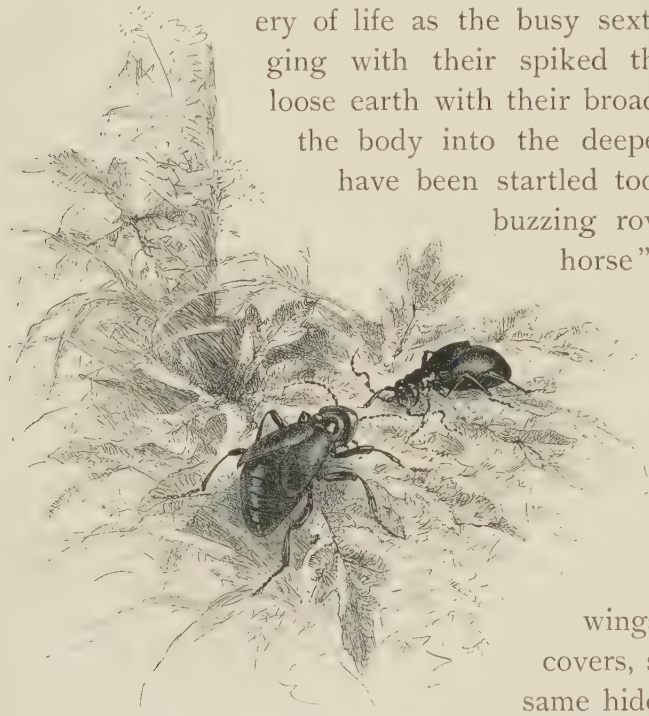
the basis of our own endowments, we are often confronted with problems whose solution would almost seem impossible excepting through admitted existence of a sixth faculty of sense. These mystical manifestations are usually classified under the general term "instinct"—a most convenient refuge for man's incapacity and ignorance. If it were the question of odor alone in this dead bird, for instance, it would be difficult to explain the bee-line flight of these humming beetles, two of which came swiftly toward me even from the direction of the wind, and drop-



ON THE SCENT.

ped quickly upon these feathers hidden from sight among the grass. Perhaps in such an instance we might imagine that they had been there before and knew the way; that they had noted this clump of yarrow, maybe; but I have observed the fact before when there was every reason to believe that no such previous visit had been made.

I am always glad of the opportunity to watch the progress of these meadow burials. And had you accompanied me on that morning walk you would have looked with interest at those little undertakers—seen that feathery body toss and heave with strange mockery of life as the busy sextons worked beneath, digging with their spiked thighs, shovelling out the loose earth with their broad heads, and pulling down the body into the deepened cavity. You would have been startled too, perhaps, at that bee-like buzzing rover the "the devil's-coach-horse" that alighted near, with its lively wriggling tail in mid-air, and you would have smiled, as I did, to see the comical alacrity with which he tilted forward the tip of that tail, and therewith tucked his filmy wings beneath their diminutive covers, sniffing the while for that same hidden prey among the grass. The use of the tails of animals has been a subject of much conjecture among naturalists; but any one who will take the pains to watch the wriggling extremity of the staphylinus, as that insect alights from flight, will conclude that, in this case at least, it serves a distinct purpose and a most important function; for without its aid those extended wings could never regain their original shelter. You will have to look quickly too, for, although requiring several distinct processes of folding, the act is performed so dexterously as almost to elude detection.



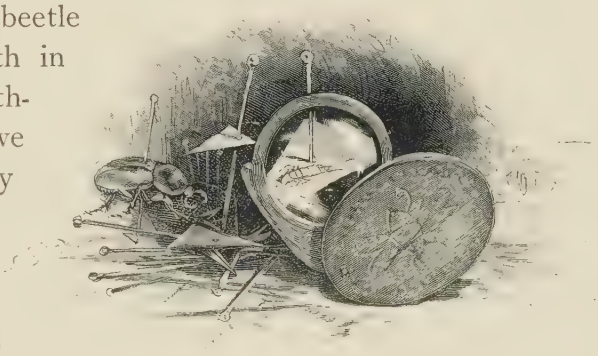
THE "POOR BEETLE."

Both these insects feed on, and deposit their eggs in, carrion; and while the "devil's-coach-horse" is not known to assist in the digging of

the grave, he is generally nosing around, I notice — perhaps to enliven the dismal proceeding by an air of frisky cheerfulness and comicality.

The process of burial is swift or slow, depending on the size of the dead body, the number of beetles, and the character of the soil. Ordinarily a small bird or mouse is sunk several inches in the ground and covered with earth during the space of twenty-four hours. The female beetle often conceals herself within the carcass, with which she is inhumed, finally emerging after having deposited therein a number of eggs, gauged in number to the proportions of the buried carcass. These soon hatch into voracious larvæ, which devour every particle of decay, appearing as perfect beetles in the spring, leaving nothing in the ground but a clean, white skeleton, whose grave is soon marked in the meadow by a tuft of fresh green grass.

There is still another beetle which is commonly met with in our rambles. It is of all others "the poor beetle that we tread upon;" for while many ground beetles are nimble of wing and limb, and easily elude our vigilance, this floundering individual, known as the meloè, is not only wingless but fat and helpless as a baby.



UNDER THE GLASS.

In their proper season it is rarely that I do not discover several of these wingless, helpless beetles during the course of my walks. And here, among the buttercups and beaten grasses of these footprints, I found a pair of them, one of which lay crushed by a careless step, while the other, with a sort of pathetic helplessness, moved about its dead mate, caressing it with its antennæ, and endeavoring by many tender efforts to coax it back to life. I picked up the uninjured specimen, and dropped it into my insect-bottle to carry home.

In color the meloè is of a deep indigo-blue, rotund in form—indeed, facetiously suggesting a small bluing-bag. When touched it exudes from every joint a yellowish liquid, from which habit it is commonly known as the "oil-beetle," and by which it will be readily recognized.

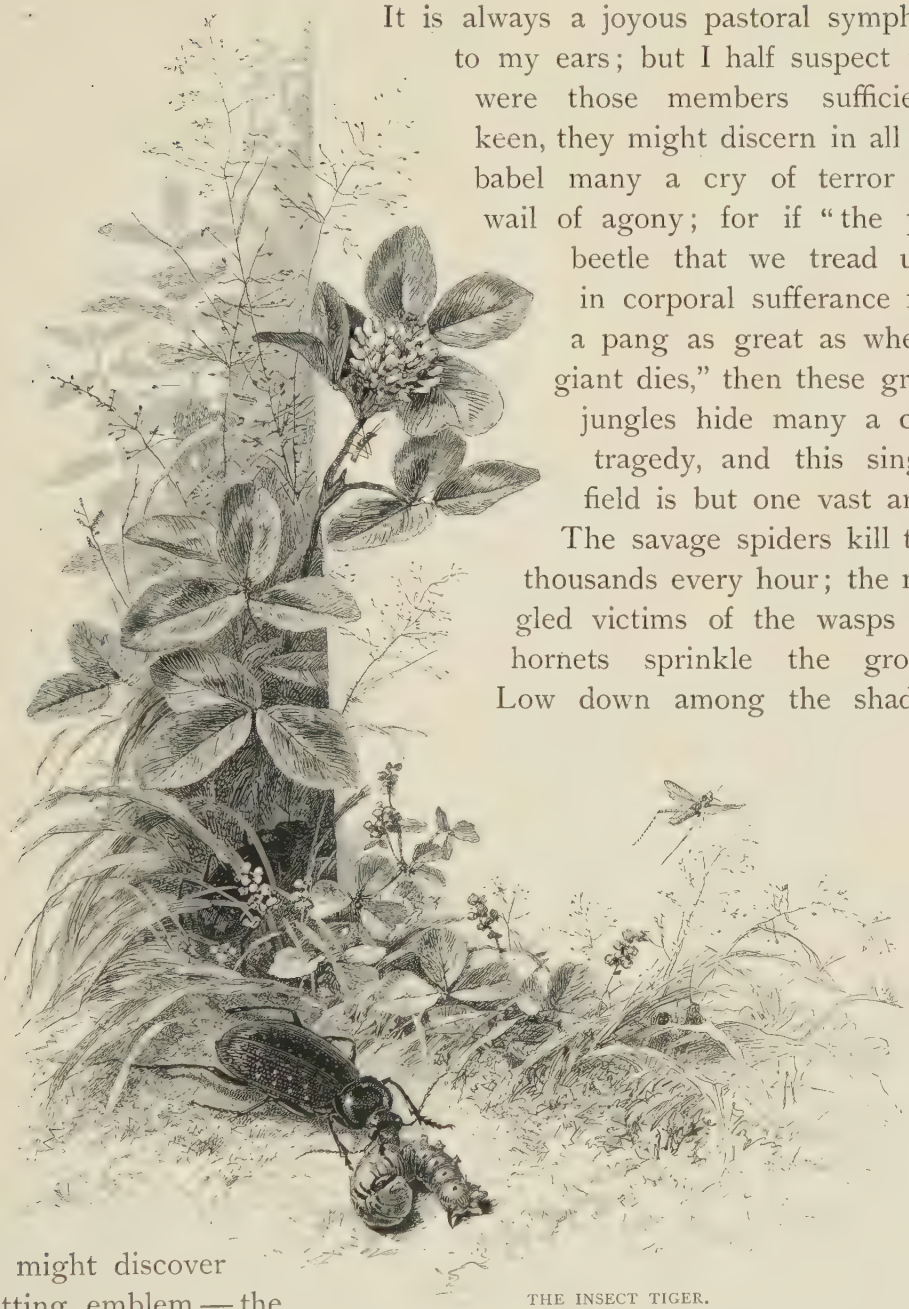
Clumsy and unattractive as this beetle is, it is nevertheless much more interesting than one would imagine; and when, on my return

home, I took the insect out of the bottle, and was enabled to relate its curious life-history, it was gratifying at least to hear one appreciative listener admit that "that bug's young uns were putty smart."

And he was not mistaken. Briefly told, the history of this common blue beetle is as follows: It feeds upon the leaves of buttercups, on the ground beneath which the female deposits her eggs, several hundred in number. These hatch into minute but surprisingly active larvæ, scarcely larger than the hyphen of this page. They immediately crawl up the stems of neighboring plants and nestle among the blossoms—one of the many "mysteries that cups of flowers enfold." I have seen large numbers of them in a single buttercup.

Beneath the magnifying-glass this tiny creature is seen to possess six long, spider-like legs. They are given to the grub only at this early stage of its existence, and for a special and remarkable purpose. It is not in quest of honey that this atom seeks the blossom, but merely as its lair, in which to lie in wait for its victim. Presently it comes, in the shape of a bee that alights upon the flower. In an instant the agile meloè jumps upon the body of the intruder, which it clutches tightly with those six clasping legs. Thus clinging, it is carried into the hive; and when the bee reaches its cell the meloè releases its hold and creeps into its new home, where it finds the plump white bee-grub a ready breakfast. By the time the young bee is devoured the meloè casts its skin, and assumes the form common to the larvæ of many beetles, the long legs having disappeared. Thenceforth the insect feeds upon the bee-bread stored by its duped foster-mother, until, when fully grown, it passes into the pupa stage, and soon re-appears as that guileless innocent tumbling in our foot-path.

There has always been to me a strange fascination in that great wing chorus which goes up from those myriads of sounding timbrels among our grassy fields and sedgy marshes—that endless, palpitating chord of teeming life which seems to stir the very air in tremulous waves as it rises, quivering, above the grass-tips. What a dizzy tangle of sounds! There is the high, shrilling note of the black cricket down among the roots, and now the "zip-zip-zee" of those brown striped grasshoppers, with their fragile glass thighs and leaf-like wings of gauzy green. There is the ever-present undertone of the orchestra of locusts tuning their legion of tiny fiddles, while swarms of slender katydids creep and sing among the dancing grass-blades.



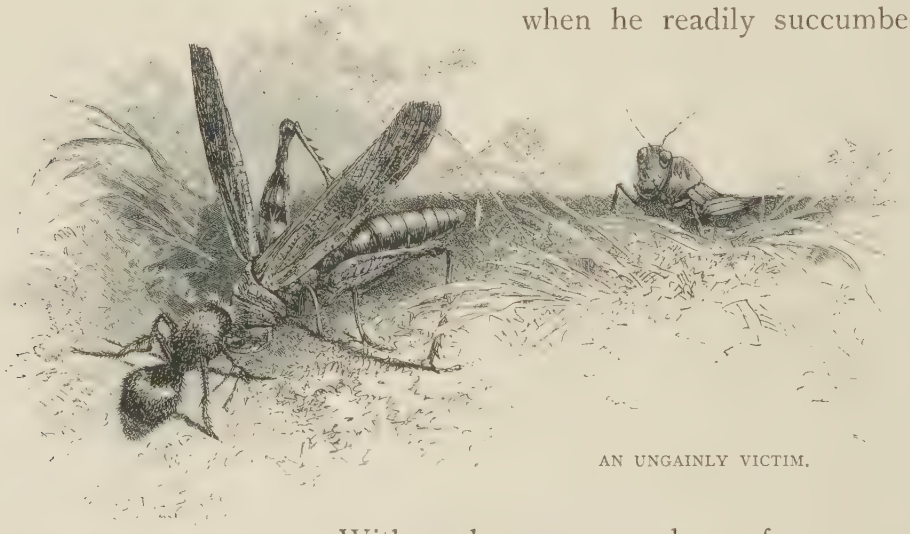
THE INSECT TIGER.

It is always a joyous pastoral symphony to my ears; but I half suspect that, were those members sufficiently keen, they might discern in all that babel many a cry of terror and wail of agony; for if "the poor beetle that we tread upon in corporal sufferance feels a pang as great as when a giant dies," then these grassy jungles hide many a cruel tragedy, and this singing field is but one vast arena. The savage spiders kill their thousands every hour; the mangled victims of the wasps and hornets sprinkle the ground. Low down among the shadows you might discover a fitting emblem — the little spotted-spurge, lying prostrate, with its stain of blood on every leaf. You may chance to hear a single plaintive trill from some tiny climbing-cricket near. It is a cadence that has no place in all this din, for he is a pale creature of the twilight, and lifts his voice only in the darkness. It was not a

song, but a cry of terror at some green-eyed monster of a dragon-fly that had peered in and surprised him in that cosy hiding-place among the blossoms.

Even as I looked across this Conway meadow my attention was arrested by an unnatural motion of the leaves of a milk-weed near, and on closer scrutiny I saw a large black beetle creeping slyly up the stem and out upon a leaf, where an *Archippus* caterpillar was feeding. In another instant the caterpillar was writhing on the ground with a mortal wound, while its murderer dropped pell-mell from leaf to leaf in eagerness to finish its deadly work. This was the fierce carnivorous beetle, one of the "tigers" of the insect world, a glossy black creature, with gilt spots like golden nails in his coat of armor.

I witnessed another long but unequal battle on that morning between a large Mutilla ant and an ungainly grasshopper. The conflict lasted fully five minutes, until the grasshopper felt the fangs of the Mutilla at the nape of the neck, when he readily succumbed.



AN UNGAINLY VICTIM.

With such savage murderers forever prowling among the shadows, with the nets of the spider spread on every hand, and hungry toads and snakes with their prying eyes seeking out every nook and cranny, it would seem that life among our singing meadows were anything but a round of pleasure. While "for our gayer hours Nature has a voice of gladness and a smile," here we look upon her joyless face—an expression grim and mysterious as the silent Sphinx. But to the devout listener at those lips there have been revealed occasional whispers; and while to him who reads the book of

Nature as he runs it verily would seem as though the mark of Cain appeared on every page, science tells us — and observation lends its verity—that this wholesale slaughter, not only among the insect tribes, but throughout all animated nature, is but the wise ultimatum destined for the preservation of him who bears "the image of his Maker;" that these professional murderers are but Nature's potent allies in her great vital scheme of universal equilibrium—harmony born of discord.

"In the brake how fierce
The war of weak and strong! i' th' air what plots!"

Not even the fluttering butterfly is safe, but is pounced upon in mid-air by the great sand-hornet, its wings torn off in mockery, and, thus shorn of its glory, is lugged off to some dark hole in the ground; and the bee returning to its hive is waylaid on the wing, its body torn open by this armed *mignon*, whose progeny would seem to have held in perpetuity the death-warrant from Queen Titania—

"The honey-bags steal from the humblebees,
And for night-tapers crop their waxen thighs."

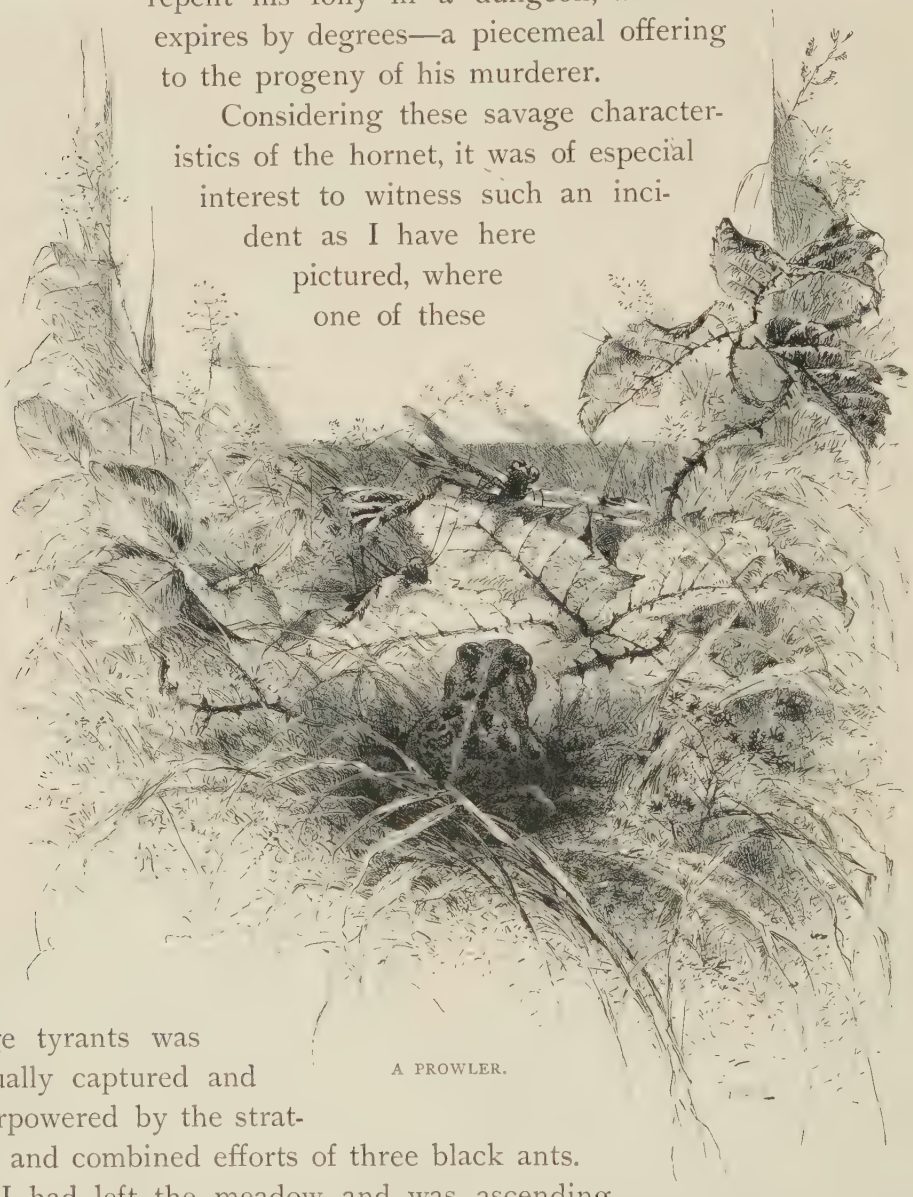
This sand-hornet is the greatest villain that flies on insect wings, and he is built for a professional murderer. He carries two keen cimeters besides a deadly poisoned poniard, and is mailed throughout with invulnerable armor. He has things all his own way; he lives a life of tyranny, and feeds on blood. There are few birds—none that I know of — that care to swallow such a red-hot morsel. It is said that not even the butcher-bird hankers after him. The toad will not touch him, seeming to know by instinct what sort of chain-lightning he contains. Among insects this hornet has been called the "harpy eagle," and nearly all of them are at his mercy. Even the cicada, or drumming harvest-fly, an insect often larger and heavier than himself, is his very common victim. Some one with a grievance and a poetical bent has been known to sigh,

"Happy the cicadas' lives,
Since they all have noiseless wives."

But it were not well to trust too implicitly this ideal picture of domestic bliss, this "consummation devoutly to be wished;" for in the monopoly of this precious prerogative the "happy" head of the house often sounds

his own death-knell, and pays the penalty with his head. The fangs of the destroyer cut short his tirade, and he is hurried off the scene to repent his folly in a dungeon, where he expires by degrees—a piecemeal offering to the progeny of his murderer.

Considering these savage characteristics of the hornet, it was of especial interest to witness such an incident as I have here pictured, where one of these huge tyrants was actually captured and overpowered by the strategy and combined efforts of three black ants.



A PROWLER.

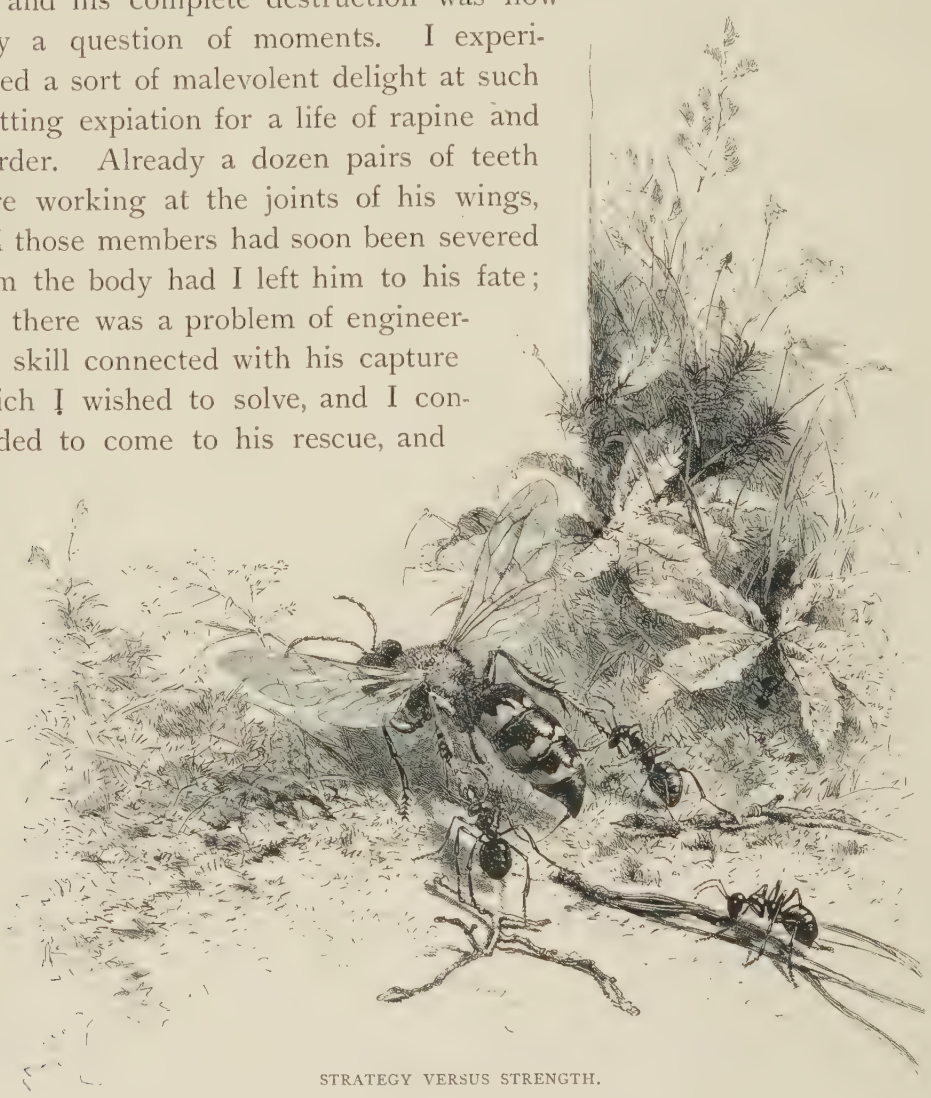
I had left the meadow, and was ascending a spur of the mountain by the edge of a pine wood, when suddenly I espied the hornet in question almost at my feet. He immediately took wing, and as he flew on ahead of me I observed a long pendent object dangling from his body. The encumbrance proved too great an obstacle for continuous flight, and he soon again dropped upon the path, a rod

or so in advance of me. I overtook him, and on a close inspection discovered a plucky black ant clutching tightly with its teeth upon the hind-foot of its captive, while with its two hind-legs it clung desperately to a long cluster of pine-needles which it carried as a dead-weight. No sooner did the hornet touch the ground than the ant began to tug and yell for help. There were certainly evidences to warrant such a belief, for a second ant immediately appeared upon the scene, emerging hurriedly from a neighboring thicket of pine-tree moss. He was too late, however, for the hornet again sought escape in flight. But this attempt was even more futile than the former, for his plucky little assailant had now laid hold of another impediment, and this time not only the long pine-needles but a small branched stick also was seen swinging through the air. Only a yard or so was covered in this flight; and as the ant still yelled for re-enforcements, its companion again appeared, and rushed upon the common foe with such furious zeal that I felt like patting him on the back. The whole significance of the scene he had taken in at a glance, and in an instant he too had secured a vise-like grip upon the other hind-leg. Now came the final tug of war. The hornet tried to rise, but this second passenger was too much for him; he could only buzz along the ground, dragging his load after him, while his new assailant clutched desperately at everything within its reach—now a dried leaf, now a tiny stone, and even overturning an acorn cup in its grasp. Finally a small rough stick was secured, and this proved the "last straw." In vain were the struggles to escape. The captive could scarcely lift his body from the ground. He rolled and kicked and tumbled, but to no purpose, except to make it very lively for his captors; and the thrusts of that lively dagger were wasted on the desert air, for, whether or not those ants knew its searching propensities, they certainly managed to keep clear of this busy extremity.

How long this pell-mell battle would have lasted I know not, for a third ant now appeared, and it was astonishing to see how with every movement of the hornet this third assailant would lay hold upon some convenient stick, and at the same time clutch upon those pine-needles—still held by the original captor—to add thereto the burden of its own weighted body.

Practically the ants had won the victory, but what they intended to do with the floundering elephant in their hands seemed a problem. But to them it was only a question of patience. They had now pinned their

victim securely, and held him to await assistance. It came. The entire neighborhood had been apprised of the battle, and in less than five minutes the ground swarmed with an army of re-enforcements. They came from all directions; they pitched upon that hornet with terrible ferocity, and his complete destruction was now only a question of moments. I experienced a sort of malevolent delight at such a fitting expiation for a life of rapine and murder. Already a dozen pairs of teeth were working at the joints of his wings, and those members had soon been severed from the body had I left him to his fate; but there was a problem of engineering skill connected with his capture which I wished to solve, and I concluded to come to his rescue, and



STRATEGY VERSUS STRENGTH.

even spare his life if need be, in an interesting experiment. I therefore dislodged all the ants excepting the two original assailants. The overwhelming attack upon the hornet had made him furious, but these pugnacious little fellows were even now more than his match, and still held him as before. No sooner, however, did I remove from their grasp those

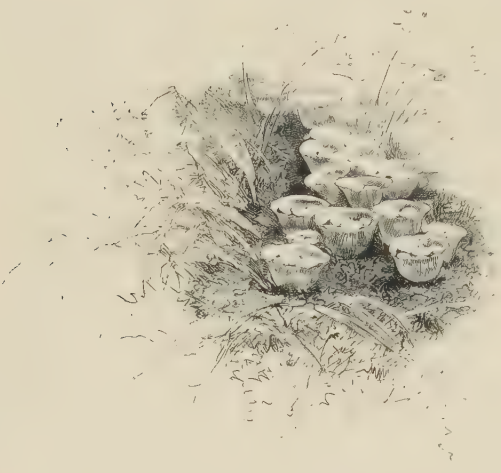
extra weights of sticks and pine-needles than their victim took wing, and was soon out of sight. But he still carried his doom in his flight in these two mischievous passengers, still bent on his destruction; and my conviction is firm that they were even yet his executioners.

Verily, it is sometimes pleasant to imagine one's self a sluggard and seek the ant for wisdom. Time spent in the study of these sagacious little creatures is never lost. Books have been filled to the glory of their industry, wisdom, and intelligence; and one is almost led to contemplate with envy the record of discovery among the absorbing pages of Huber, and, later, the researches of Sir John Lubbock, the illustrious historians of this wonderful little people. Huber it was who made the astounding disclosure that ants keep slaves; that a certain species of red-ant, uniting in an army of invasion, is wont to take by storm the city of a weaker species, devastating their homes, and often carrying off by main force the entire population, all of which, as prisoners of war, are removed without bodily harm to the subterranean city of the enemy, where they are reared in menial servitude.

The problem of the ant's strange visits to the aphides, or plant-lice—that curious exhibition which any one may witness in a half-hour's walk in the country — was first solved by the researches of Huber, in whose works we read the remarkable discovery which so startled the scientific world: that the aphides seem especially provided by Nature as the milch cows for the ants, yielding to them a sweet secretion, called honey-dew, of which they are very fond; that this honey-dew is not only sought and obtained from the aphides in their native haunts, but that the little creatures are actually transported bodily and tenderly borne away into the subterranean apartments of the ants, placed in diminutive cattle-pens constructed for the purpose, and thus fed, reared, and domesticated.

To many these facts will present nothing new; but to such they will at least serve to freshen the memory in the appreciation of a useful and industrious class of our community, who are too little considered, too often forgotten, until their demonstrations at some rural picnic only serve to bring them into further disrepute and hasten their untimely end. Of all the animated life that we tread beneath our feet the ant is the most inconspicuous and omnipresent. In no creature on the globe is there such a disproportion in comparative size and intellect. These diminutive, well-rounded heads do a deal of tall thinking, and there is much yet to be learned of the mysteries concealed beneath the ant-hill.

If there is any one class of natural objects which is more than any other especially ignored by nearly all "walkers" and nature-students generally, it is the wonderful tribe of cryptogamous plants known as fungi—the great family of toadstools, mushrooms, moulds, and mildews — forms of vegetation which present some of the most inexplicable and mysterious phenomena to be found in the whole vegetable kingdom.



BIRD-NEST FUNGUS.

A gentleman well known to scientists as an authority on the subject of American fungi, and whom I count it an honor to call my friend, recently almost took my breath away as he told me, in company with several other friends eagerly assembled about his microscope, that the myriads of beautiful spores which we observed in that bright field of his objective actually did not cover a space much larger than the diameter of a needle. "And yet," continued he, "each individual of them is capable, under favorable conditions, of reproducing a cluster of these puff-balls which I hold in my hand. It is fortunate for us that the fastidiousness of this plant allows it to vegetate only upon dead wood; for otherwise there are enough of those spores contained in this one specimen, were each to germinate and mature, to crowd the whole surface of the United States, and this cluster could easily be the means of covering the entire globe." Whether considered as figurative or not, the reproductive possibilities of these plants are something almost beyond computation. There is further light thrown upon this subject by Fries, the eminent fungologist, who says of a plant

FAIRY PARASOLS.

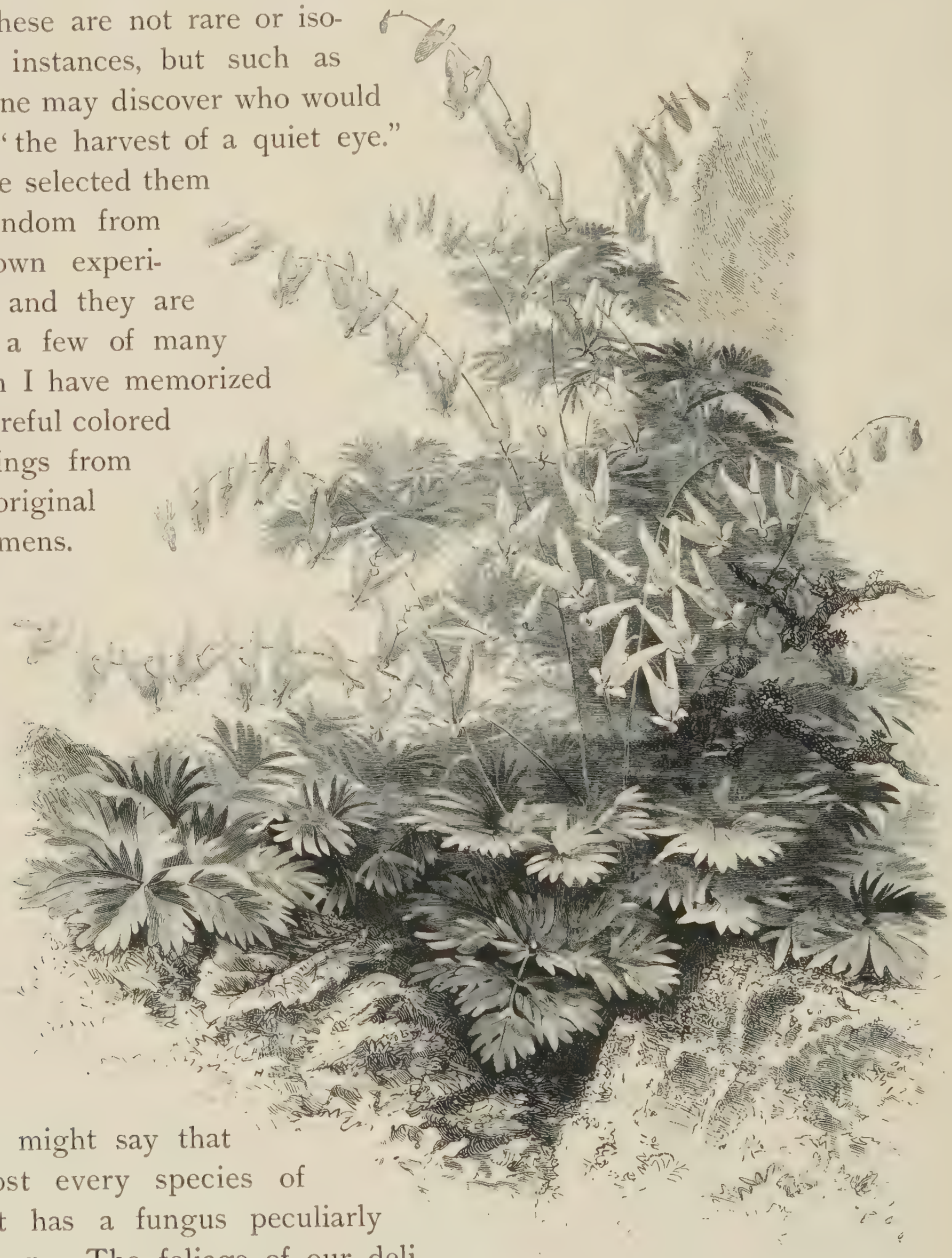
closely allied to the above specimen: "The sporules are infinite, for in a single individual of *Reticularia maxima* I have reckoned ten millions, so subtile as to resemble thin smoke, as light as if raised by evaporation, and dispersed in so many ways that it is difficult to conceive the spots from which they could be excluded."

When it is known that a single one of these plants will cover an area of seven square inches, and, moreover, that a single spore will often reproduce a whole cluster of the same, it becomes a simple matter to compute the enormity of the resultant area. It is a genuine treat to walk the woods and fields with a companion versed in the science of fungology. A new page of Nature's wondrous history is turned with every step, and an infinity seems to open up from every heap of rubbish and every unsightly clod. The damp woods are especially rich in forms of fungous growth. They offer a limitless museum of these strange and beautiful curiosities of vegetable life. Here are tiny bird-nests filled with eggs clustering upon a lump of leaf-mould, or crowding upon this dried stick that snaps beneath your heel. Fragile fairy parasols lift their slender forms above the dried leaf. You have crushed hundreds of them in your path. Sometimes as many as twenty will be seen growing upon a single leaf, long since too far gone to need their shelter. Perhaps you will chance upon a beautiful drooping hydnum, with its crowded creamy fringe hanging from the prostrate beech-trunk; but you would not leave this tender growth to decay in the woods if you knew it for the dainty morsel it actually is. The whole tribe of mushrooms yields few such delicacies. The little barometer, the "earth-star," will send forth its cloud of dust as you pass to warn you of that coming storm, or, if the day should happen to be clear and dry, will clasp its pointed fingers protectingly about its little puff-ball. Near by a heavy stone is lifting up among the matted carpet of pine-needles, while from beneath its edge a great red-faced mushroom protrudes its head to tell of its struggle through the mould.

As you sit upon the mossy log a bright orange bit of color at your side arrests your attention. It proves to be a small toadstool, and as you pull it from its bed you lift upon its root—a lump of leaf mould? No, a large brown chrysalis, through whose shell those fibrous roots have penetrated, drawing their sustenance from the imprisoned moth still seen within. Neither is this a chance freak of Nature, but rather an illustration of one of the eccentricities of this class of plants. This

is a distinct variety of fungus, whose spores will germinate only upon a chrysalis or caterpillar; and it is believed, moreover, that it is confined to a single species of insect.

These are not rare or isolated instances, but such as any one may discover who would reap "the harvest of a quiet eye." I have selected them at random from my own experience, and they are only a few of many which I have memorized by careful colored drawings from the original specimens.



DICENTRA.

I might say that almost every species of plant has a fungus peculiarly its own. The foliage of our delicate lance-leaved golden-rod has two such parasites, while the lilac, alder, ash, beech, etc., are also known to be thus affected—to the ordinary eye

appearing as a bloom or coat of dust, but beneath the lens assuming widely different and specific forms. Here is an old dried chestnut burr picked up at a venture. Search it a moment, and you will find its spines covered with small white mushrooms. These are known to the dead chestnut burr alone, as they never vegetate on any other substance.

There is often an almost inexhaustible field for botanic investigation even on a single fallen tree. My scientific friend already alluded to recently informed me, on his return from an exploring tour, that he had spent two days most delightfully and profitably in the study of the yield of a single dead tree, and had surprised himself by a discovery by actual count of over a hundred distinct species of plants congregated upon it. Plumy dicentra clustered along its length, graceful sprays of the frost-flower, with its little spire of snow crystals, rose up here and there, scarlet berries of the Indian turnip glowed among the leaves, and, with the crowding beds of lycopodiums and mosses, its ferns and lichens, and host of fungous growths, it became an easy matter to extend the list of species into the second hundred. It is something worth remembering the next time we go into the woods.

Apropos of the subject of fungi I am reminded of a singular incident related to me by the late Professor Wood, the botanist. He had received from a bee-keeper in California, together with a most appealing letter, a small box of dead bees, all of which were heavily laden with a thick covering of very small paddle-shaped substances of a brownish color. The accompanying letter stated that thousands upon thousands of the writer's bees had been attacked and were dying from this strange disease. He supposed it to be a kind of fungus, but nobody could explain its nature or suggest a cure. His business was threatened with ruin, and in his extremity he appealed to professional skill for a remedy.

Mr. Wood was not long in ascertaining the cause of the trouble. A small magnifier revealed the fact that the so-called fungus was nothing more than the sticky pollen of a certain milk-weed. He wrote immediately to his correspondent stating his discovery, told him to search the country for several miles in his neighborhood, and he would somewhere surely discover a large tract of this mischievous Asclepias. In about a fortnight he received another letter, confirming his theory. The plants abounded in the locality, and had been cut down and burned, after which the trouble had ceased.

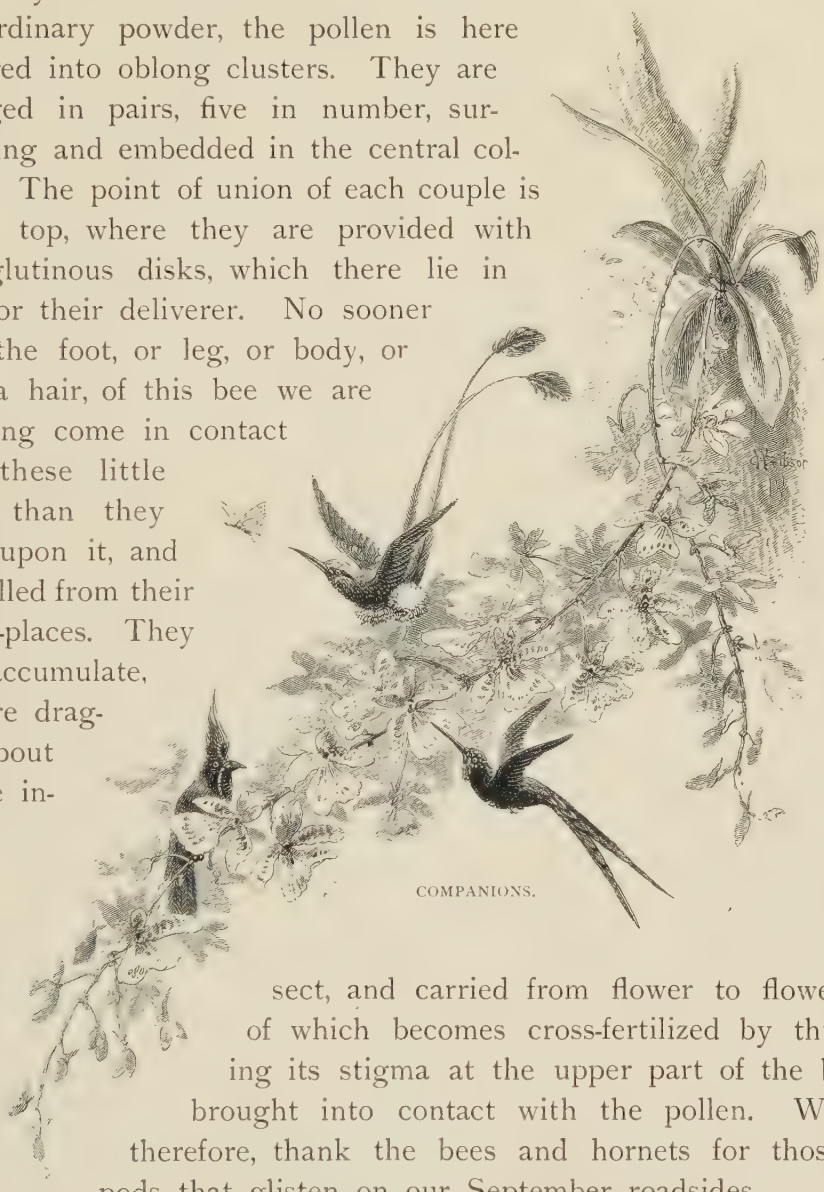
This peculiarity of the milk-weed is common to the genus, and it is not a rare thing to find floundering among the blossoms of our ordinary species a honey-bee or bumblebee encumbered as seen in our illustration, "A Victim of Greed," which in its embarrassed condition has become an easy prey to a swarm of ants. This figure was drawn from a specimen now in my possession. The insect was one of several recently found upon a plant of our common Asclepias. Other specimens were a yellow-jacket, several honey-bees, and a beautiful Cetonia beetle, whose brilliant shining body and smooth legs had escaped, but whose toes were tufted with little brushes, or pompons, of the pollen masses.

A VICTIM OF GREED.

The pollen of most plants exists in the form of the well-known yellow powder, and is dusted freely from the opening anthers. But the milk-weed presents quite a novel arrangement. Like the wonderful tribe of orchids, as well as a long list of other plants, the Asclepias is entirely dependent upon the aid of insects not only for its fertilization, but for the shedding of its pollen. Any one who will carefully examine its flower will discover the five little cups, like minute cornucopias, surrounding its central column. These are the nectaries, containing the sweets so attractive to the insects; and it is amusing to watch the eager antics of the bumblebee as he follows around the circle, thrusting his long black tongue deep into each sac. If you now observe still closer, you will see how Nature utilizes the insect in the propagation of those fuzzy seed-clouds.

It is scarcely necessary to refer to the fact that in order for a plant to set seed it is necessary that the stigma of the flower shall be dusted with the pollen. We see it naturally performed in many blossoms, but

in the milk-weed such a spontaneous process is impossible, for the pollen is concealed in a pouch, from which it never would escape unless withdrawn by some external force. Instead of the ordinary powder, the pollen is here gathered into oblong clusters. They are arranged in pairs, five in number, surrounding and embedded in the central column. The point of union of each couple is at the top, where they are provided with two glutinous disks, which there lie in wait for their deliverer. No sooner does the foot, or leg, or body, or even a hair, of this bee we are watching come in contact with these little disks than they clasp upon it, and are pulled from their hiding-places. They thus accumulate, and are dragged about by the insect, and carried from flower to flower, each of which becomes cross-fertilized by thus having its stigma at the upper part of the blossom brought into contact with the pollen. We may, therefore, thank the bees and hornets for those silky pods that glisten on our September roadsides.



COMPANIONS.

Remarkable as is the structure of the milk-weed blossom, it is surpassed in interest by the wondrous mechanism found among the orchids. Here is a family of plants numbering some thousands of known species, and yet nearly all of them would be doomed to extinction were it not for their legion of little insect friends. And the marvels of ingenuity by

which Nature insures their aid are almost past belief. The hosts of humming-birds, too, that throng the Paradise of the Amazons! How significant the coincidence! for here the orchids dwell in all their splendor and profusion. How many of those rare blossoms look to these winged sun-gems for the condition of their existence!

It is enough to make one dumb with awe and wonderment even to contemplate the inexhaustible variety in their freaks of outward form alone, and it will be a day long to be remembered by any one who is fortunate enough to spend an hour or two within the fairy tropics of a conservatory devoted to these blossoms of the air. Here are colors and tones that are not of this world, but rather radiations borrowed from the celestial rainbow and the sunset and the pure blue sky. Here are scintillating textures woven with yellow light, and twilight purples of a hundred hues.

And what astounding mimicry! Here a grotesque form that might almost be mistaken for a bee! Here a long spray hung full with great green spiders clinging on the stem; a little dove spreads its wings, as though alighting in a blossom near; and again a comical frog grins at you from the shadows of a den of petals. Observe—quick! ere it flies—this brilliant butterfly hovering above the flowers! It is an orchid.

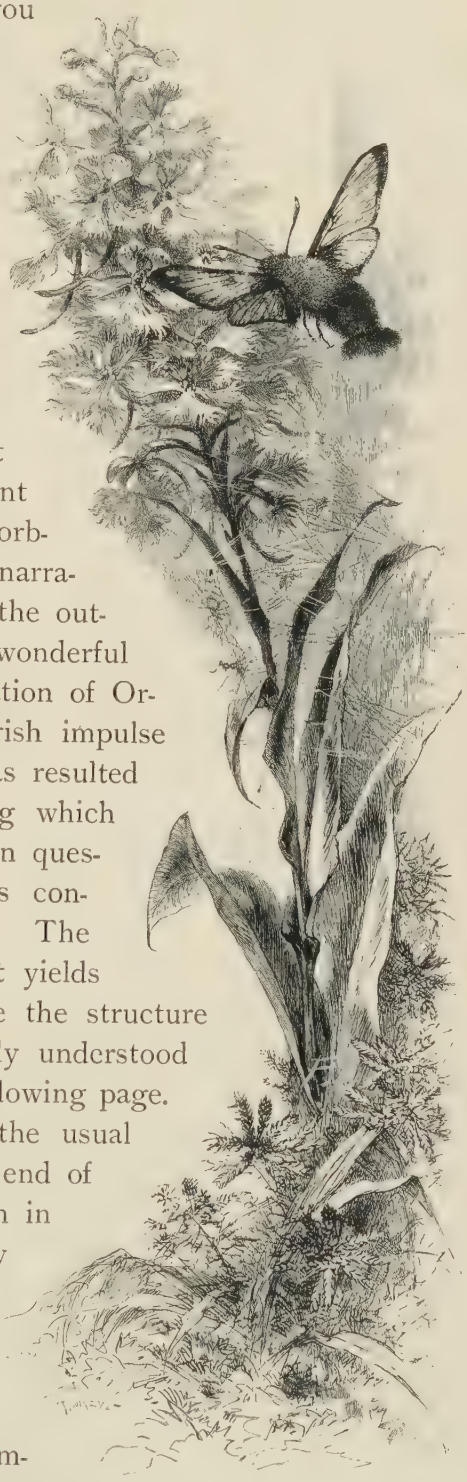
This great tribe of plants, among the most beautiful on the face of the earth, were only quite recently revealed to us in all their true significance. Their endless forms and colors have afforded sufficient stimulus to most botanists; but any one who will go through an orchid conservatory in company with Darwin will acquire a vastly increased interest in these flowers, of which their strange shapes are but an alluring hint.

It is not necessary, however, to seek the aid of the florist in order to study the mystery of the orchid. We can go into our woods and fields and find an abundant harvest for investigation. There is the little spiranthes, or ladies'-tresses, to be seen in almost any summer ramble. All who love the hemlock woods will remember the common cypripedium, or moccason-flower, also called lady's-slipper; and the fragrant "grass pink," or sweet-scented Arethusa, with its lovely purple blossom, will be associated with the memory of many a marshy meadow.

Were you to retrace your steps you might still reclaim a delicate, wilting spray which lies broken in your footpath, where it bloomed

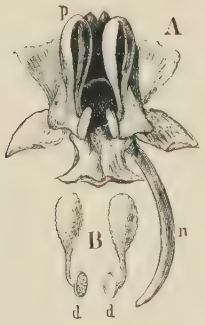
unheéded among the sedges. Had you known its charming secret, or seen its murmuring nursling kissing its every flower, you never had trodden upon it. It is the little fringed orchid, *Platanthera psycodes*, of our moist meadows. Perhaps the accompanying illustration will serve to recall it, if the imagination lend its aid in imparting to its fringed petals a tint of delicate lavender purple.

The life-history of this flower, as it has been revealed to me through recent observations of my own, is of such absorbing interest that I am tempted into a narrative of my investigations. They were the outcome of an intent perusal of Darwin's wonderful discoveries chronicled in his "Fertilization of Orchids." This book led me with feverish impulse into the conservatory and field, and has resulted in a large number of drawings, among which are those relating to the little orchid in question. Like many flowers, this one is constructed on a principle of reciprocity. The insects serve the plant, and the plant yields them food in return. Let us examine the structure of this little orchid. It will be readily understood by reference to the diagrams on the following page. In this instance the bait consists of the usual sweet secretion, here deposited at the end of a curved tubular nectary, nearly an inch in length. The opening to this nectary is seen directly in the heart of the flower. But observe how that entrance is guarded—defended with two clubs, if I may so speak, the pollen masses bearing some such resemblance. These are hidden in two pockets,



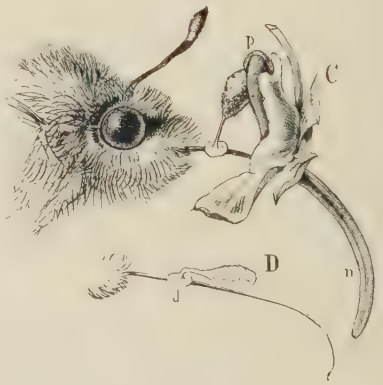
THE ORCHID AND ITS FRIEND.

one on each side of the opening. The lower extremity of each is provided with a flat, sticky disk, turned inward. This is all very simple. The trap is set. Now let us see how it works. A small brown hawk-moth hovers near; he poises like a humming-bird in front of the blossom, uncoils his slender tongue, and thrusts it into the opening of the nectary. So transparent is this tiny tube that you can readily see, not only the tongue within, but the gradual absorption of the nectar. As the moth thus sips he brings his tongue in contact with one or both of the sticky disks. They clasp it firmly, and as the member is withdrawn they are pulled out of their pockets, and stand erect upon the insect's tongue. This alone is surprising, but what follows is stranger still. In a very few seconds the little club begins to sink forward, gradually lowering, until it has brought itself nearly level with the tongue. Wilted, you will imagine. Not so; it is still firm in its new position. And what will be your surprise, if you watch closely as the humming rover sips from the next flower, on seeing the tips of that club so tilted strike directly against the stigma, or fertilizing surface, just above the opening of the nectary! The flower is thus fertilized, and will mature its seeds.



CONSTRUCTION OF ORCHID.

A, centre of flower (petals removed); p, pouches containing pollen clubs, with the two disks guarding the opening to nectary, n; B, pollen clubs isolated, to show their position in pouches, and their two glutinous disks, d d. The stigma of flower is indicated by the rough spot above opening to nectary.



REMOVAL OF POLLEN.

C, side view of flower (petals removed), showing head of sphinx-moth and removal of pollen on insect's tongue; D, position immediately assumed by pollen club, the sticky disk, d, clasping the insect's tongue.

The flowers are frequented by several kinds of insects, but this little day-flying sphinx is one of their most common visitors; and the very conformation of the orchid would indicate, from its slender tube and the distance of the nectar from the orifice, an adaptation to the long, slender tongues of moths and butterflies. I have never happened to see a bee upon this orchid, and I doubt whether the insect could reach the nectar unless, perhaps, through the external

puncture of some bumblebee, which insect has a well-known trick of cutting matters short, and saving itself trouble, by biting through the honey-tube from the outside. Only a few days since I watched a bumblebee in a bed of toad-flax thus cheating Nature and rifling the blossoms; and in a whole bouquet afterward gathered it was difficult to find a single flower, or even mature bud, whose nectary had not been thus punctured near its tip.

These experiments with the orchid may be tried by any one. The drawings herewith given were made from an actual specimen of the insect, which suffered martyrdom in the cause. You may observe the appearance of its tongue after searching a few nectaries. While making the drawing a common house-fly lit among the blossoms, and, although it appeared to know the neighborhood of the bait, it seemed powerless to reach it. With a little forcible encouragement on my part, however, the insect succeeded in getting one of its eyes decorated with a pollen club.

A MARTYR TO SCIENCE.

It was interesting, also, to notice the sagacity of a diminutive spider that seemed to know the attraction of those honey-tubes, and had spread its web among the blossoms. Its meshes were sprinkled with minute insects, among which I discovered one rash atom with a club-shaped appendage, as large as its body, firmly attached to the top of its head.

There are several other of our native orchids commonly met with equally if not more interesting; and in each variety there will be found some new and wonderful adaptation, some surprising mechanism, for the removal and utility of its pollen. In Arethusa and pogonia it is a little lid that lifts as the bee leaves the flower, and lets fall the pollen on the intruder's back. The cypripedium of our woods is a veritable trap, with but one exit, in escaping from which the insect gets a dab of pollen on its head, or thorax; and I might continue the list indefinitely.

The fertilization of the greater green orchis, described by Professor Gray, presents a remarkable adaptation to a distinct family of insects. In this species the nectary is about two inches in length, and only the slender tongue of the sphinx-moths could reach its sweets; moreover, the disks, with evident design, are here placed far apart, and as the moth seeks the nectar the rounded projecting eyes are brought directly in contact with those clinging surfaces, and the pollen masses are thus borne

away upon the insect's eyes. In a few seconds they droop as already described, and at such an angle as to exactly strike the stigma of the flower next visited.

These are our own native species; but in the pages of Darwin there are described many exotic varieties of most intricate and amazing mechanism, by which Nature, while thus preventing the self-fertilization of the flower, equally insures its cross-fertilization, thus affording unanswerable arguments in favor of the pet theories of this great philosopher.

There are similar mysteries concealed within the hearts of many of our most common wild flowers, and it is one of the most inspiring fascinations of Nature-study that, while rewarding her devotees with a full measure of her confidence, she still allures them on with an inexhaustible reserve. You may discover some unknown flower, dissect and analyze its parts, and find its place among the genera and species of vegetation; but there are strange testimonies beneath its conformation that are still unheeded, even as in these curious orchids, known and classified long ere Darwin sought the secret of their wondrous forms.

We cannot all be scientists or explorers, but we can at least learn to lend an answering intelligent welcome to those little faces that smile at us from among the grass and withered leaves, that crowd humbly about our feet, and are too often idly crushed beneath our heel. The darkest pathless forest is relieved of its gloom to him who can nod a greeting with every footstep; who knows the pale dicentra that nods to him in return; who can call by name the peeping lizard among the moss, the pale white pipe among the matted leaves, or even the covering mould among the damp débris.

And to him who knows the arcana beneath a stone; who has learned with reverence how the clover goes to sleep, how the fire-weed spins its silken floss, or how the spider floats its web from tree to tree; who has seen the brilliant cassida, the palpitating gem upon the leaf, change from burnished gold to iridescent pearl, or has watched the wondrous resurrection of the imago bursting from its living tomb—to such a one there is in all the length and breadth of Nature no such thing as exile, no such thought as loneliness, and it were the voice of an unknown sentiment which should declare that

> "A primrose by a river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more."

For there was a something deeper, something sweeter, that unfolded with those dewy petals, something from that heart laid bare that breathed its perfumed whisper in the gloaming, and found its answer in that throb of sympathy, a love which might still further feel, and, feeling, whisper in return:

"The bubbling brook doth leap when I come by,
Because my feet find measure with its call;
The birds know when the friend they love is nigh,
For I am known to them, both great and small;
The flower that on the lonely hill-side grows
Expects me there when spring its bloom has given;
And many a tree and bush my wanderings knows,
And e'en the clouds and silent stars of heaven."

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